

# **OF MARRIAGEABLE AGE:**


## **RETHINKING APPROACHES TO FATHER-DAUGHTER INCEST NARRATIVES IN THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University of Tasmania or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

  
29/9/05

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines father-daughter incest in three literary works of the long eighteenth century within a frame of the marriage exchange gone wrong. The representation of father-daughter incest in this period, unlike contemporary incest stories that feature girl-children, focuses on the daughter of marriageable age, a prominent figure in eighteenth-century literature. The incest is often precipitated at the moment that the father should be planning a marriage alliance for his daughter but instead begins to see her as a sexual being. The three texts examined in the thesis are Jane Barker's *Exilius, or The Banish'd Roman* (published in 1714), Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci* and Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*, both written in 1819. The chapters are structured around the three main characters within the incest plot – the daughter, the suitor(s), and the father. In these texts, the daughter is past the age of consent, is a desiring subject herself and knows she is the incestuous object of her biological father. The texts, in which father-daughter incest is structurally and thematically central, belong to the wider literary and social debates about marriage and the daughter of marriageable age, which dominate the century. This thesis focuses on the female characters/daughters of marriageable age as they struggle to bring their incest experiences into language, and as they live out the consequences of that experience. The domestic space is a potentially dangerous one for daughters. Each of these narratives of father-daughter incest also has political implications. A close reading of the male figures – the suitor(s) and the fathers – brings to light a Jacobite reading in *Exilius*, a critique of the worst kind of patriarchal society in *The Cenci* and a criticism of a society that allows excesses and self indulgence in *Mathilda*.

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# CONTENTS

**PREFACE:**

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| What's in a Kiss? ..... | 2 |
|-------------------------|---|

**INTRODUCTION**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| The Daughter, Marriage and Incest ..... | 11 |
|---|----|

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| <b>PART I</b> ..... | 38 |
|---------------------|----|

**CHAPTER ONE:**

|                    |    |
|--------------------|----|
| The Daughter ..... | 38 |
|--------------------|----|

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| <b>PART II</b> ..... | 128 |
|----------------------|-----|

**CHAPTER TWO:**

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| The Suitor(s) ..... | 130 |
|---------------------|-----|

**CHAPTER THREE:**

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| The Father ..... | 155 |
|------------------|-----|

|                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| <b>CONCLUSION:</b> ..... | 212 |
|--------------------------|-----|

**APPENDIX ONE:**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| The Prologue to the 1886 Staging of <i>The Cenci</i> ..... | 251 |
|--|-----|

|                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| <b>WORKS CITED</b> ..... | 253 |
|--------------------------|-----|

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>OTHER WORKS CONSULTED</b> ..... | 268 |
|------------------------------------|-----|

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| <b>FIGURE 1:</b> Auguste Rodin, <b>The Kiss</b> , 1901-4 .....  | 1       |
| <b>FIGURE 2:</b>  |         |
| Right: Sir Joshua Reynolds, <b>Miss Susanna Gale</b> , 1763-64  |         |
| Left: Joseph Highmore, <b>Susanna Highmore</b> , c.1745-50 .....  | 11      |
| <b>FIGURE 3:</b>  |         |
| Elisabetta Sirani, <b>Sibyl</b> (until recently thought to be a portrait of Beatrice Cenci painted by Guido Reni), date unknown .....   | 14, 229 |
| <b>FIGURE 4:</b>  |         |
| Table of Kindred and Affinity, from <i>The Book of Common Prayer</i> , Cambridge, Eng: Baskerville, 1761. (as reprinted in James B. Twitchell. <i>Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture</i> 129) ..... | 18      |
| <b>FIGURE 5:</b>  |         |
| William Hogarth, <b>Marriage A-la-Mode, Plate I</b> , 1745 .....  | 25      |
| <b>FIGURE 6:</b>  |         |
| Achille Leonardi, <b>Imprisonment of Beatrice Cenci</b> , 1830/40 .....   | 230     |
| <b>FIGURE 7:</b>  |         |
| Guido Reni, Alleged painting of <b>Beatrice Cenci</b> , Academy of San Luca, Rome, date unknown .....   | 237     |
| <b>FIGURE 8:</b>  |         |
| Guido Reni, <b>San Michele</b> , c 1636 .....   | 238     |
| <b>FIGURE 9:</b>  |         |
| Harriet Hosmer, <b>Beatrice Cenci</b> , 1857 .....  | 240     |
| <b>FIGURE 10:</b>   |         |
| Harriet Hosmer, <b>Beatrice Cenci</b> , 1857 .....  | 240     |
| <b>FIGURE 11:</b>   |         |
| Julia Margaret Cameron, <b>Beatrice</b> , 1870 .....  | 242     |
| <b>FIGURE 12:</b>   |         |
| Julia Margaret Cameron, <b>Beatrice</b> , 1866 .....  | 243     |
| <b>FIGURES 13:</b>  |         |
| 13: Julia Margaret Cameron, <b>Beatrice</b> , 1866 .....  | 244     |
| <b>FIGURES 14:</b>  |         |
| 14: Julia Margaret Cameron, <b>A Study of the Cenci</b> , 1868 .....  | 244     |
| <b>FIGURES 15:</b>  |         |
| 15: Julia Margaret Cameron, <b>A Study of the Cenci</b> , 1868 .....  | 244     |
| <b>FIGURE 16:</b>   |         |
| Felicity Clausen-Stemwald as <b>Beatrice Cenci</b> in the People's Theatre production of <i>The Cenci</i> , 2001 .....  | 248     |

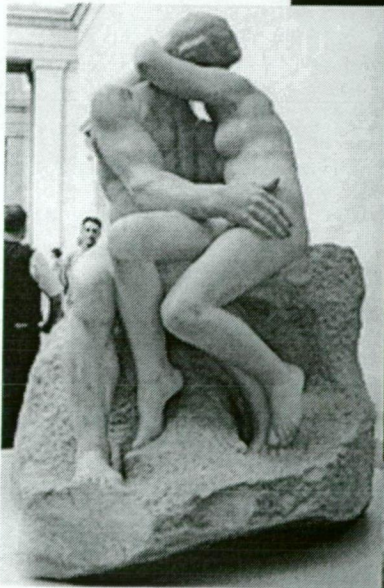
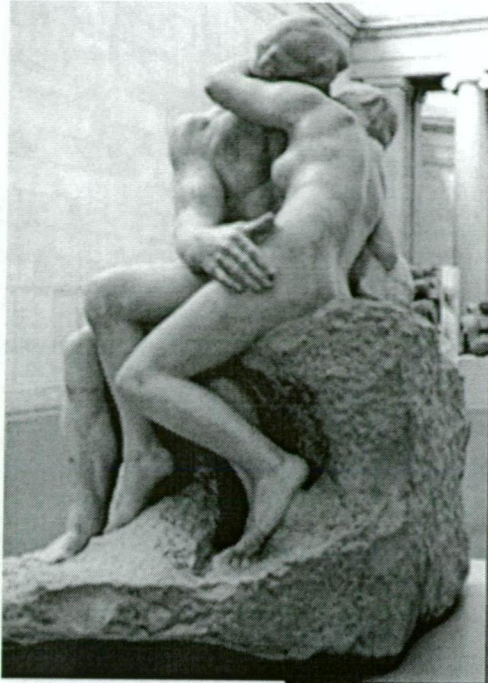


Figure 1

## PREFACE: WHAT'S IN A KISS?

There is no doubt that in “The Kiss” [French sculptor Auguste] Rodin invented one of the great images in art of human sexual love, whose power derives from its beautifully judged balance between a high degree of idealisation in the depiction of the bodies of the couple and the equally high degree of eroticism with which Rodin has nevertheless succeeded in imbuing the work. The erotic edge of “The Kiss” is sharpened when its subject from Dante is known. The couple are Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini. Francesca was married to Paolo’s brother but fell in love with Paolo, himself a married man. They were discovered and murdered by Francesca’s outraged husband. In Dante, Francesca recounts how she and Paolo were first moved to physical passion by reading together the Arthurian legend of Lancelot—when they read of Lancelot’s first embrace of Queen Guinevere they could resist each other no longer. This is the moment that Rodin has depicted. (Simon Wilson 150)

As Simon Wilson points out here, “The Kiss” (**Figure 1**) is a highly sensual and sexual sculpture and its “erotic edge is sharpened” when its narrative from the *Divine Comedy* is told. I remember standing back from the sculpture, when I visited the Tate Gallery in London taking in, not only my own reaction to the work but also, the reactions of others who circled it before me. In my mind’s eye, I see a mix of emotions crossing the faces of the other gallery goers as well as rising emotion within myself. “The Kiss” exudes eroticism but as Wilson says, something changes when a narrative is attached to the work, when “its subject from Dante is known.” Why is this? Art critic John Berger contends that words change images. It is hard, he says, “to define exactly how the words have changed the image but undoubtedly they have. The image now illustrates a sentence” (28). Add a narrative to an image and the image is implicated in the narrative.

Imagine a new narrative for “The Kiss.” You are in the Tate Gallery on a guided tour:

"I want to tell you a story," the guide said pausing before "The Kiss." The tourists were barely listening, finding the sensuality and sexuality emanating from the work capturing their full attention. The smoothness of the stone almost urged them to reach out and touch it, to be part of that tender caress.

"I want to tell you a story," the guide said again, sensing their distractedness. He paused as all eyes momentarily turned to him. "There has recently been a very important discovery about this work," he said.

"A letter written by Rodin has been found. In it, he describes the work to his lover. His lover was his sister." The words were barely whispered. All ears and eyes were now turned to the guide. The group was suddenly gasping. "Oh! Oh! Oh!" echoed throughout the room.

Some members of the group blushed but most turned away. Yet within a moment they wanted to look again, they felt the pull to explore this work in a new light—they wanted to understand this love, the sexual love of a brother and sister presented before them. Could it really be this beautiful, they ask of themselves.

This narrative pulls the viewer from the secretive terrain of adultery into the taboo territory of incest. What happens to the viewer's experience?

Imagine that the guide now opens a book and begins to read:

He slid naked into the bed beside his sister, murmuring:  
"Olive Oyl."

Her long body was pressed against his in a fervour of gratitude for the love-name, for it had never received absolution from her husband as it did from this man; and she returned, in as loving a murmur: "Pop-eye." Again the two pairs of eyes stared into each other at an inch or so's distance. His, though deep in bony sockets like hers, were prominent there, the eyeballs rounded under thin, already crinkling, bruised-looking flesh. Hers, however, were delicately outlined by clear white skin, and he kissed the perfected copies of his own ugly eyes and said, as she pressed towards him: "Now, now, Olive Oyl, don't be in such a hurry, You'll spoil it."

"No we won't."

"Wait, I tell you."

"All right then. . . ."

The two bodies, deeply breathing, remained still a long while. Her hand, on the small of his back, made soft, circular pressing motion, bringing him inwards. He had his two hands on her hip-bones holding her still. But she succeeded, and they joined, and he said again: "Wait now. Lie Still," They lay absolutely still, eyes closed. (Lessing 193-194)

Once the characters are identified as brother and sister, the scene proceeds in the language used conventionally to express the socially sanctioned desire of heterosexual couples. But the gallery-goer listening to these words while looking at "The Kiss" now blushes as if publicly embarrassed.

Can it get worse? Imagine the guide looking up from the book and saying to the tour group in the measured tones of information:

"A letter written by Rodin to his lover has been found. In it, he describes the work to his lover. His lover was his daughter." Silence fell. Suddenly exclamations and horrified sounds left their mouths echoing to every corner of the large cavernous room. Some reached to cover their eyes and, yes, almost all turned away, their stomachs churning. One woman ran for the bathroom unable to contain the sick feeling in the pit of her stomach.

The guide continued: "In the letter Rodin begs his daughter for forgiveness expressing his distress at having put her through such trauma. It appears that by this time, his relationship with his daughter had fallen apart and she was living among the nuns in a French mental asylum. Her thoughts on the matter are unknown but Rodin dedicated *The Kiss* to her in an attempt to show her the depths of his feelings for her."

The tour group no longer wanted to touch the statue or bask in its sensuality and sexuality. Feelings of distress replaced their enjoyment of the work; they did not know where to turn or go. They felt burdened and unable to escape this knowledge.

Why is this narrative more disturbing than imagining the sexual involvement of brother and sister? Perhaps because a range of imaginative strategies exists that helps the reader transcend the dwelling on the physical act of brother-sister incest. These operate as a coping mechanism. For example, we know that throughout history some societies such as Egypt condoned brother-sister marriage within the royal classes. Familiar representations of the Pharaoh and his sister side by side on the throne are so stylised that they seem to transcend the particular and hence the physical. We know stories that imagine brother and sister as two parts of a whole, a perfect union of masculine and feminine characteristics. "I am Heathcliff," Cathy says famously of her adopted brother in *Wuthering Heights* (82). Although

these relationships are most often depicted as destructive and most frequently end in death, they are held up as a poetic ideal. Finally, there are commonly held assumptions that also help remove the focus from the physical, that is, the belief that brother and sister love is a perfect love between equals.

But love between a father and his daughter in the narratives we read is not idealised in our culture. There is no mechanism of transcendence used to displace father-daughter incest narratives.<sup>1</sup> Father-daughter incest narratives, particularly those of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, are largely about and interpreted as stories of abuse of the daughter. Feminist research acts like a spotlight exposing what was hidden, keeping the particular insistently on view. There is no transcendence here, no romanticising into an abstract ideal of any sort. The feminist view is that incest is an experience from which the daughter will have to struggle to recover, that is if recovery is even possible. So would such a narrative “sharpen the erotic edge” as Wilson imagines Dante’s doing? Would the narrative destroy the erotic altogether and replace it with revulsion?

The guide now reads to the patrons from *The Kiss*:

With his hand under my chin, my father draws my face toward his own. He touches lips to mine. I stiffen.

I’ve seen it before fathers kissing their daughters on the mouth. A friend of mine’s father has kissed her this way for years, and I’ve watched them, unable to look away, disquieted by what I see. In my family, lip-to-lip kisses between parent and child are considered as vulgar as spitting in public or not washing your hands after using the toilet, all of which failures my grandmother would judge as evidence of poor upbringing. She might excuse such kisses from a person raised in an exotic, backward culture, but never from a decent American.

A voice over the public-address system announces the final boarding call for my father’s flight. As I pull away, feeling the resistance of his hand behind my head, how tightly he holds me to him, the kiss changes. It is no longer a chaste, close-lipped kiss. (Harrison, *The Kiss* 67)



This passage encodes the “disquiet” raised by the sexual father-daughter kiss. But it is worse; this is no fiction but an extract from a memoir, Kathryn Harrison’s *The Kiss*. When the memoir appeared outraged readers asked how Harrison could write about being involved in a consensual affair with her father—from the age of twenty to twenty-four—when she had two small children of her own. The text itself raises many questions about consenting relationships between family members. When does age matter in a parent-child relationship? Does the parent-child power balance ever alter? Mostly critics seem unable to “cope” with Harrison’s representation of herself in the text as a desiring subject. It is one thing to accept that fathers can desire daughters, another altogether to contemplate a daughter returning the desire. Harrison had moreover violated the “sacred” obligations of motherhood by exposing her children to her past.

And yet, before *The Kiss*, when Harrison wrote father-daughter incest into her first novel, *Thicker than Water*, the fiction was well received. If all father-daughter incest representations trouble viewers and readers, some seem to trouble them more than others. Sue Halpern writing for *The New York Review of Books* (1997) considers the disparity in the reception of the fictional *Thicker than Water* and the avowedly autobiographical memoir *The Kiss*:

When it was published, *Thicker than Water* received many favourable reviews. The writer, who was thirty years old, was praised for her use of language, which was at once direct and distilled and for her command of the material. But one review in particular, by Scott Spencer, writing in *The New York Times Book Review*, is especially prescient: “The first two words of *Thicker than Water* are ‘In Truth’, and as the novel plunges into a woman’s painfully frank and unsparing revelations about her miserable childhood and her struggle to awaken from its dank, hypnotic spell, this reader felt, at times, that he was reading a harrowing, fully imagined work of nonfiction.” And, so it turned out, he was.

What is interesting about his comment in retrospect is that neither Mr. Spencer nor any of the other reviewers who suspected that *Thicker than Water* detailed real events chastised Ms. Harrison



for writing about the affair. No one argued that it was exploitative or potentially damaging to her children or that her rendering was meretricious. No one suggested that she should not have written it or, at least, if she had to write it, that she should not have published it. No one said anything of the sort because the story was told behind the veil of fiction. As long as there was the slightest possibility that the story was not true, veracity could be the object of speculation, not the subject of criticism. As long as the story was just a story, no one needed to consider its impact on the family or the author's motive in publishing the book. As fiction, both the writer and the reader, were protected. (14)

Halpern suggests that different assumptions about motivation attach to narratives of father-daughter incest positioned as fiction or non-fiction:

In the vitriolic controversy that occurred after *The Kiss* came out, greed, notoriety, and revenge were each suggested to be the author's motivation for writing and then publishing the book. If so, it would not be the first time a book has drawn from any of these wells. But more likely *The Kiss* first came from a deeper place—the need to lay bare—that only a book that has no pretense can get at. (14)

The reaction to *The Kiss* clearly demonstrates the reader's discomfort and wish to be disconnected from such a narrative; it also reveals that the need to disconnect is greater when the story is "real." But this may be only a matter of degree within a range of very disturbing responses. I am not sure that the reader is ever protected when it comes to father-daughter incest narratives, be the texts fictional or real. It may be slightly easier to invoke the thought that it is only fiction, but some texts such as Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, for example, are so powerful that this is unlikely.

The woman-daughter, like Harrison, is the figure on which this thesis will focus. I will call her the daughter of marriageable age, which I will explain in more detail in the Introduction. She is central in the three texts from the long eighteenth century with which I am working—Jane Barker's *Exilius, Or the Banish'd Roman* (dated 1716 but published in 1714)<sup>2</sup>, and Percy Bysshe Shelley's

*The Cenci* and Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*, both written in 1819. The daughter in each—as in Harrison's fictional and biographical texts—is past the age of consent, is a desiring subject herself, and knows she is the incestuous object of her biological father. She also speaks for herself, articulating her experience. Of the three, *Mathilda* shares the most with *The Kiss*, both exploring notions of a shared love between father and daughter.

Two broad questions underlie this study of incest narratives: How are the incest stories constructed and told and how are they read? In the Introduction I will examine the figure of the daughter of marriageable age, consider definitions of incest and how they vary from one historical period to the next, as well as how incest circulates around the daughter of marriageable age. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, feminism, particularly feminist psychoanalysis, has become the dominant mode of reading such narratives. It is my argument that when applied to texts of the long eighteenth century, this dominant modern discourse obscures as much about the text as it reveals. Unlike texts from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, *Exilius, Or the Banish'd Roman*, *The Cenci*, and *Mathilda* resist being read in only this way. In the long eighteenth century, father-daughter incest is presented in the frame of the marriage exchange gone wrong. The incest is often precipitated at the moment that the father should be planning a marriage alliance for his daughter but instead begins to see her as a sexual being. In this frame, the incest has both domestic and political implications. The domestic implications, that is, the representation of the home as a potentially dangerous space and daughterhood as a dangerous status for young women at the moment they reach marriageable age, are portrayed through the daughter. I am particularly interested in the construction of father-daughter incest that crosses into the taboo

territory where the daughter forms the incest into the language acts of thought and speech. Although the focus is on language, the incest in these texts has moved beyond unarticulated desire represented to the reader only through character behaviour to a declaration of incest, attempted rape and rape. This places the acts, that is the actual experience of incest, in the spectrum in which it is harder to deny but also much more difficult to form into a language act. Part I will focus on this moment as these female characters/daughters of marriageable age struggle to bring their incest experiences into language. What do we learn about incest and its accumulation of meaning at this moment? And how do the daughters cope with the incestuous act? I began by looking at the sculpture “The Kiss” because thinking about an incest narrative attached to the sculpture immediately focuses attention on how language destabilises the work. It also opens the path to thinking about what incest stories say and how they say it. I will return to the destabilising effects of attaching an incestuous narrative to a work of visual art when I consider the strange history of representing Beatrice Cenci. The political rhetoric and arguments of each text circulate around the two male figures in the incest triad—the suitor(s) and the father, the focus of Part II. The suitor has two main roles. The first is to draw attention to the daughter’s sexuality and status as of marriageable age. The second is as a point of comparison with the father. The father is, of course, responsible for the incestuous act and as the wealthy patriarch is the link with the world outside the domestic sphere revealing the political implications of each text.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> No mechanism of transcendence exists for other configurations of incest such as mother-son, father-son or mother-daughter, which are not the concern of this thesis. Rather than having a transcendental mechanism, mother-son incest has become abstracted through psychology, through Freud's application of the story of Oedipus to childhood development. The few fictional mother-son incest stories tend to be about maternal dominance, a complete abrogation of "normal" power structures, and an "oddity". In the course of my reading, I have only come across one novel, two short stories, and one play featuring mother-son incest, apart from Sophocles' *Oedipus*. The novel is a detective story by Lynda La Plante called *Cold Shoulder*, while the first short story "Sleepwalking" by Amy Bloom found in *Come to Me* is about a sexual encounter between stepmother and son. Horace Walpole's 1768 Gothic play, *The Mysterious Mother* also features mother-son incest as does Story Thirty from Marguerite De Navarre's *Heptameron*, written about 1549 (in Karen Jacobsen McLennan. *Nature's Ban: Women's Incest Literature*). Father-son and mother-daughter incest, on the other hand, are rarely inscribed let alone explained. Peter Carey's *The Tax Inspector* examines the even more taboo father-son incest as well as father-daughter incest. Rosaria Champagne examines mother-daughter incest in a chapter in her book *The Politics of Survivorship* and her article "True Crimes of Motherhood: Mother-Daughter Incest, Multiple Personality Disorder and the true Crime Novel." In these works, she examines *Sybil* by Flora Rheta Schreiber and Frances Casey's *The Flock: The Autobiography of a Multiple Personality*. Kathryn Harrison's *Thicker than Water* also explores mother-daughter incest but the focus on this is deflected by the exploration of father-daughter incest.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Barker's *Exilius, Or The Banish'd Roman* is dated 1715 but was published in 1714 on the eve of Queen Anne's death, when the final Stuart was replaced by the House of Hanover. Kathryn King, who argues the novel was started as early as 1680, believes such post-dating was typical of Barker's publisher Edmund Curll. King argues that the parts of *Exilius* "completed by 1687, when it was called *Scipina*, probably included the Egyptian episode (i. 103-14), which echoes crises from the 1680s, including the Exclusion Crisis (1678-83) and Monmouth's Rebellion (1685). The history of the Queen of Egypt (i. 118-33), a monarch with secret Jewish—i.e. Roman Catholic—inclinations, may date from the 1680s as well" (n 151). *Exilius*, the character of the text's title, helps the King of Egypt to quash a number of rebellions. Part of the reason for these rebellions is the conversion of the Queen of Egypt to Judaism. These events reflect the rebellions led against James II because of his Catholic sympathies. "Vol. ii contains material suggestive of Barker's post-revolution preoccupations: the nature of cultural misrepresentation (ii. 41), the warming-pan calumnies (ii. 55-6), prophecies about the triumphs of the house of Scipio (ii. 60-1), bitter reflections on the cheats and impostures practised by priests (ii. 89-90). Some of this material may have been written at St-Germain or later" (n 152). Unlike Percy and Mary Shelley, Barker is relatively unknown. Baptised in Blatherwick, Northamptonshire on May 17, 1652, in the late seventeenth century Barker was a coterie poet. She swapped her work with a group of young poets at St John's College at Cambridge University, some of which were printed in 1687 in *Poetical Recreations*—it was dated 1688 but was on sale in December 1687. It was thought that she had made these contacts through her brother Edward but he took his bachelor's degree at Oxford not Cambridge. In the early eighteenth century, she became a novelist. She was also a landowner, a physician and from 1689 to 1704, became one of the 40,000 followers who lived at St Germain-en-Laye in France in exile with the court of James II. She was a Jacobite from a family of Jacobite sympathisers. Her father was employed by Charles I and it appears that one uncle may have died fighting against the Protestant rebel the Duke of Monmouth while another fought for James II against William of Orange. One of her nephews also died in battle in 1704. She converted to Catholicism in the mid-1680s. Although no documentary evidence of her conversion exists, there is a conversion narrative amongst her poetry held by Magdalen College, Oxford. There is also a conversion narrative in *Exilius*, although it does not have the biographical framing of the one in her poetry. When Barker returned to England in 1704, she endured the hardships, such as excessive taxes, imposed on all Catholics. She returned to France in about 1727 and died in St-Germain on March 29, 1732, two months short of turning 80. For further details see Kathryn King's various articles and book *Jane Barker, Exile: A Literary Career 1675-1725*. See also Carol Shiner Wilson. "Introduction" in *The Galesia Trilogy and Selected Manuscript Poems of Jane Barker*, and "Jane Barker (1652-1732): From Galesia to Goodwife," *Women and Poetry 1660-1750*, Margaret Anne Doody's, "Jane Barker (1652-1727?)," and Paula R. Backscheider "Jane Barker".

## INTRODUCTION: THE DAUGHTER, MARRIAGE AND INCEST



**Figure 2**

In the eighteenth-century gallery, the tour guide pauses in front of two paintings (**Figure 2**). On the left is Susanna Hyde Gale and on the right Susanna Highmore. Sir Joshua Reynolds painted the first portrait; the second was by the sitter's father Joseph Highmore. The guide tells those gathered that fourteen-year-old Gale was "the 'dear and well-beloved daughter' of a British sugar planter, Francis Gale Esquire, of Kingston and St Andrew, Jamaica. Her mother Susanna Hall, was of an old family also with large West Indian estates" (Clark 146). Gale was painted in 1763-64 while in England searching for a husband, although she did not find one during her London sojourn, marrying a prosperous merchant-landowner Sabine Turner after returning to Jamaica in 1765. Turner died nine

months into their marriage and in 1769 she married Captain Alan Gardner, eventually dying in London in 1823, aged seventy-four.

On the right, the tour guide says, is our second Susanna. Susanna Highmore was between eighteen and twenty-three when she was painted by her father who was known particularly for his portrait of the writer Samuel Richardson and for his twelve-painting series based on Richardson's novel *Pamela*. Lesser known are his depictions from Richardson's novel *Clarissa*. Highmore did not marry as early as Gale. She finally entered into a matrimonial union in 1763 when she was thirty-six after an exceptionally long courtship with the poet and clergyman John Duncombe. The guide reads from his book:

Marriage in eighteenth-century England was, for families of substance, an occasion for drawing up settlements for the protection and increase of property for both parties. Marriages, and engagements to be married, were also occasions for portraiture. In common with other eighteenth-century artists, Sir Joshua Reynolds was frequently commissioned to paint portraits of women about to be married, or recently wed. As Nicholas Penny has pointed out, men were seldom portrayed at the moment of this rite of passage. Rather their portraits would celebrate the Grand Tour or, later in life, some moment of special achievement whether civil or military. Moreover, as . . . [Marcia Pointon has] established, portraits, once executed, framed, and delivered, became part of a parcel of property with a history and a future, an object to be bequeathed, disposed of, stored, or displayed in a particular place. (Pointon 59)

As this quotation suggests, marriage was a rite of passage for daughters and images of the daughter of marriageable age as she faced this rite were commonplace among the aristocracy and middle classes in the long eighteenth century. The portraits, along with the daughter, were part of the property exchanged from father to son-in-law through the marriage.

The daughter of marriageable age is now recognisable to us through portraits that have remained. At the time, they were not on public display but hung in the picture galleries and main rooms of aristocratic and middle-class homes



within the domestic space. The daughter is also a familiar figure from a variety of texts of the time. She is the young woman in many heroine-centred novels who is poised on the threshold of marriage as she begins her search for a husband. Of marriageable age, means that she has reached the age of consent—twelve for females and fourteen for males in the long eighteenth century (Macfarlane 127, Roger Lee Brown 118).<sup>1</sup> After 1753 and the introduction of the Marriage Act, although the age of consent did not change, “under English law the marriage of those under 21, not being widows or widowers, was made illegal without the consent of parents or guardians” (Macfarlane 127). While some of these fictional narratives begin in childhood, most often the main narrative of the daughter—the moment of the now in the texts—centres on the moment of marriageability and the search for a husband. The ages of the fictional daughters vary from the age of consent upwards. At twenty-nine Ann Elliot is older as Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* attests. More often, the characters are closer to sixteen as are Emmeline and Mathilda (from the eponymous novels by Charlotte Smith and Mary Shelley) or seventeen like Lady Juliana (from Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage*) and Arabella (from Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote*). Emma (from the novel that bears her name) is a little older at twenty-one and Lydia Bennet, although not the central character of *Pride and Prejudice*, is “a favourite with her mother, whose affection had brought her into public at an early age” (40), that is, just fifteen.

The daughter of marriageable age is found not only in novels, but also in poetry and drama, and she is the target and subject of conduct books. As Vivien Jones argues, the “concern of all eighteenth-century ‘conduct’ manuals for women is how women might create themselves as objects of male desire, but in terms which will contain that desire within the publicly sanctioned form of marriage”

(*Women in the Eighteenth Century* 14; see also Armstrong, Armstrong and Tennenhouse, and Sutherland). Such notions were also explored in the literature of the time with the boundaries between “‘literary’ and other kinds of texts” quite fluid (Vivien Jones *Women in the Eighteenth Century* 7).

Pausing in the next gallery, the tour guide draws attention to another daughter of marriageable age (**Figure 3**). He holds his finger to his lips to hush his audience, whispering that he has a sad tale to tell. Beatrice Cenci, he says, never made it to the altar. Instead, she was executed by decapitation under orders from Pope Clement VIII in 1599 for murdering her father, Count Francesco Cenci. Mark



**Figure 3**

Twain, the guide says, tells us in *Life on the Mississippi* that this portrait often moves viewers to tears:

people with fine sympathetic natures stand up and weep in front of the celebrated “Beatrice Cenci the Day before her Execution.” It shows what a label can do. If they did not know the picture, they would inspect it unmoved, and say, “Young girl with hay fever; young girl with her head in a bag.” (246-247)

For Twain, the label breathes life into this portrait which otherwise looks simply like another portrait of the daughter of marriageable age, although perhaps her eyes are a little sadder. “A good legible label is usually worth, for information, a



ton of significant attitude and expression in a historical picture” (246), Twain says. Art historian and critic Corrado Ricci confirms that “rivers of tears and oceans of phrases” (2: 281) have surrounded this portrait. His own fascination with the portrait “impelled” (I: v) him to research the story of Beatrice Cenci in the 1920s. His two volumes, which systematically analyse the stories and documents surrounding her life, lay to rest many of the myths of Beatrice Cenci—including noting that Percy Bysshe Shelley created the father-daughter rape, hence the incest, in the story for his play *The Cenci*. Ricci concludes that the portrait identified as Beatrice and attributed to Italian Renaissance artist Guido Reni since the eighteenth century, the very portrait that has inspired many writers to retell the story, is in fact not of Beatrice. Art historian Stephen Pepper now attributes the work to Elisabetta Sirani who probably painted the portrait “based on a traditional turbaned sibyl derived from Guido and his school” (304).

Despite its origins, this painting is the image that Percy Shelley had in mind when he penned *The Cenci*, and the image that readers often seek out after they have read his Preface that identifies this painting as Beatrice. When Percy Shelley gazed at the portrait in the Colonna Palace in Rome, he felt the full force of its label and attached story. He saw a daughter of marriageable age, a “young maiden”(69) whom he describes in the play’s Preface as “evidently a most gentle and amiable being, a creature formed to adorn and be admired” (69), who was “violently thwarted from her nature by the necessity of circumstance and opinion” (69). Beatrice is “thwarted from her nature” by the “incestuous passion, aggravated by every circumstance of cruelty and violence” (69) of her father. Percy Shelley describes the painting as an “admirable work of art” (73) and:

a just representation of one of the loveliest specimens of the workmanship of Nature. There is a fixed and pale composure upon

the features: she seems sad and stricken down in spirit, yet the despair thus expressed is lightened by the patience of gentleness. Her head is bound with folds of white drapery, from which the yellow strings of her golden hair escape, and fall about her neck. The moulding of her face is exquisitely delicate; the eye-brows are distinct and arched; the lips have that permanent meaning of imagination and sensibility which suffering has not repressed and which it seems as if death scarcely could extinguish. Her forehead is large and clear; her eyes, which we are told were remarkable for their vivacity, are swollen with weeping and lustreless, but beautifully tender and serene. In the whole mien there is simplicity and dignity which united with her exquisite loveliness and deep sorrow are inexpressibly pathetic. (73)

Percy Shelley suggests that Beatrice is “one of those rare persons in whom energy and gentleness dwell together without destroying one another: her nature was simple and profound” (73). Beatrice—one of the daughters to be discussed in this thesis—is a daughter of marriageable age refused the possibility of suitable marriage and confronted with incest. I will leave the gallery now but will return to the exhibition of portraits and texts on Beatrice Cenci in the Conclusion when I trace the fate of the notion of the marriage exchange gone wrong. Now I will turn to explore how father-daughter incest stories in the long eighteenth century may be contextualised and read.

## **FRAMING INCEST AS THE MARRIAGE EXCHANGE GONE WRONG**

In the long eighteenth century, definitions of incest are about marriage rather than child sexual abuse.<sup>2</sup> The definitions are drawn from ecclesiastical notions of incest developed from Leviticus in *The Bible* and printed as the Table of Kindred and Affinity in *The Book of Common Prayer*. The Table essentially details all relationships for whom marriage is prohibited. Although the ecclesiastical stance was in place by the start of the long eighteenth century, the growth in interest in natural law altered and influenced views on incest as the

century progressed. Incest in this era, then, is a problem for the daughter of marriageable age and not for the girl-child who features in incest stories of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The daughter of marriageable age has reached the age of consent; the girl-child has not and hence the term child sexual abuse. At times, the trauma for both daughters may be similar but their narratives are marked by historical particularities which make them distinctively different. While contemporary stories of incest focus largely on the father and daughter, with some consideration of the mother, those in the long eighteenth century include a suitor. The suitor alerts the father to the fact that his daughter of marriageable age is sexually desirable. I will argue, drawing on the work of Gayle Rubin and Lynda Boose, that when incest is averted, the daughter passes from the father to the suitor, but when the exchange goes wrong, she remains in the family space, which then becomes polluted because it incorporates the daughter as an adult sexual being.

### PROHIBITIONS ON MARRIAGE

During the period leading up to the long eighteenth century, the Church of England transformed the Biblical prohibitions on sexual relations in Leviticus 18 into prohibitions on marriage. The categories changing bans on sexual relations to bans on marriage partners, were published as the Table of Kindred and Affinity in *The Book of Common Prayer* (**Figure 4**). Leviticus prohibits sexual relationships with your father, mother, father's wife, sister, son's daughter, daughter's daughter, father's wife's daughter, father's sister, mother's sister, father's brother, father's brother's wife, daughter-in-law and brother's wife. Calum M. Carmichael argues in his book *Law, Legend and Incest in the Bible* "that interpreters" (40) of the Levitical rules are not always aware of how they were formulated and "that the

**Figure 4**

# A Table of Kindred and Affinity, wherein whosoever are related are forbidden in Scripture, and our Laws, to marry together.

*A Man may not marry his*

1. Grandmother.
2. Grandfather's Wife.
3. Wife's Grandmother.
4. Father's sister.
5. Mother's Sister.
6. Father's Brother's Wife.
7. Mother's Brother's Wife.
8. Wife's Father's Sister.
9. Wife's Mother's Sister.
10. Mother.
11. Step-mother.
12. Wife's Mother.
13. Daughter.
14. Wife's Daughter.
15. Son's Wife.
16. Sister.
17. Wife's Sister.
18. Brother's Wife.
19. Son's Daughter.
20. Daughter's Daughter.
21. Son's Son's Wife.
22. Daughter's Son's Wife.
23. Wife's Son's Daughter.
24. Wife's Daughter's Daughter.
25. Brother's Daughter.
26. Sister's Daughter.
27. Brother's Son's Wife.
28. Sister's Son's Wife.
29. Wife's Brother's Daughter.
30. Wife's Sister's Daughter

*A Woman may not marry with her*

1. Grandfather
2. Grandmother's Husband.
3. Husband's Grandfather.
4. Father's Brother
5. Mother's Brother
6. Father's Sister's Husband
7. Mother's Sister's Husband
8. Husband's Father's Brother
9. Husband's Mother's Brother
10. Father
11. Step-father
12. Husband's Father
13. son
14. Husband's Son
15. Daughter's Husband
16. Brother
17. Husband's Brother
18. Sister's Husband
19. Son's Son
20. Daughter's Son
21. Son's Daughter's Husband
22. Daughter's Daughter's Husband
23. Husband's Son's Son
24. Husband's Daughter's Son
25. Brother's Son
26. Sister's Son
27. Brother's Daughter's Husband
28. Sister's Daughter's Husband
29. Husband's Brother's Son
30. Husband's Sister's Son

From *The Book of Common Prayer*, Cambridge, Eng: Baskerville, 1761  
(as reprinted in James B. Twitchell. *Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in  
Modern Culture* 129)

automatic assumption that the rules necessarily governed the society of the time is a wrong one" (40). According to Carmichael the Levitical rules on incest existed because at some points the Old Testament seems to offer a licence for incestuous unions:

I refer to the remarkable number of liaisons between close kin in the early narratives of the Bible. For example, in the books of Genesis and Exodus the daughters of Lot produce sons by their father; Abraham marries his half-sister Sarah; Jacob marries two sisters who are his first cousins; Nabor marries his niece (that is, his brother's daughter); Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar, seeks a remedy for the childless state by having intercourse with her father-in-law; Moses's father marries his aunt (that is, his father's sister). In 2 Samuel, David's daughter Tamar tells her half-brother, Amnon, who is sexually harassing her, that he should go to their father so that David can find a proper way by which the two siblings can marry. (5)

Carmichael points out that in Leviticus the relationships of Abraham and Sarah, Tamar and Amnon, Moses and his aunt, Tamar and her father-in-law are considered incestuous but the first cousin union and that of a man and his niece are not prohibited. He also comments on the strangeness of the rules. For example, the fact that there is no prohibition against intercourse with a son or a daughter and yet there is a rule on menstruation. He asks why the first rule prohibiting a son's violation of his father should need to "be set down at all" (6) and questions the fact that there are no "prohibitions against intercourse with a son or a daughter" (7). And why, he asks, is the initial rule "addressed to the child or a family as though he, or she, would be the instigator of an incestuous liaison" (7). He argues that the aim of the "Levitical language was . . . to create rules that would shape the identity of the Israelites" (190) and were:

primarily products of his commentary on the traditions about his first ancestors. Idiosyncratic developments in the legends about them triggered the rules. However counterintuitive our rejection, one should not read the rules as direct responses to the economic, religious, social and sexual issues articulated in them. (192)

Lynda Boose argues that the daughter is conspicuous for her absence in a list in which almost “every conceivable family female” (64) is listed as “off-limits” (64). Judith Herman takes it further suggesting that what is prohibited is the “sexual use” of women who belong to other relatives. The daughter:

belongs to the father alone. Though the incest taboo forbids him to make sexual use of his daughter, no particular man’s rights are offended, should the father choose to disregard this rule. As long as he ultimately gives his daughter in marriage, he has fulfilled the social purpose of the rule of the gift. Until such time as he chooses to give her away, he has the uncontested power to do with her as he wishes. Hence, of all possible forms of incest, that between father and daughter is most easily overlooked. (60)

Once the marriage exchange depends upon the bride being a virgin, the situation changes radically, as we see in the novels of Samuel Richardson, who as Janet Todd says:

gave an immense significance to female chastity, raising it from a physical condition to a spiritual state. The situations in which he displayed this chastity became current in the culture and all writing women must have felt to some extent the pressure of his first two novels: *Pamela* (1740-1), the story of a chaste servant whose virtue is rewarded in marriage to her erstwhile seducing master, and *Clarissa* (1747-8), the story of unfair paternal pressure on a supremely virtuous girl who leaves her father’s house only to be raped by Lovelace, the man in whom she had put her trust. (*Sign of Angellica* 142-143)

The path of the transformation of Leviticus to the Table of Kindred and Affinity began with Henry VIII. As Ellen Pollack argues in *Incest and the English Novel 1684-1814*<sup>3</sup>:

the question of the status of the Levitical prohibitions in binding Christian conduct “was strangely tossed up and down” in connection with Henry’s efforts to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, the widow of his deceased brother Arthur. (28)

The marriage was regarded as within the prohibited degrees because Catherine had been married to Henry’s brother, rather than because they were blood relatives. Twenty years later Henry wanted the Catholic Church to withdraw its

dispensation arguing that his “own failure to produce an heir [w]as divine punishment for his transgression of the Levitical injunction against a man’s having sexual relations with his brother’s wife” (Pollack 29). Henry’s argument began a religious debate wherein Catherine’s supporters quoted Deuteronomy, suggesting it was acceptable for a man to marry his deceased brother’s widow if his “brother had died without issue” (Pollack 29).

During his reign Henry issued four statutes on prohibited marriages:

The first two (issued in 1533 and 1536) designated which kin were off-limits as sexual or conjugal partners, including in their restrictions all the relatives mentioned in Leviticus 18 and 20, with the addition of the wife’s sister, who is not mentioned there. The second two Henrican statutes (of 1536 and 1540) declared that all marriages not expressly forbidden by divine law or not outside the Levitical degrees were legal. Did these second two statutes, then, contradict the earlier rulings prohibiting marriage with the deceased wife’s sister? This question would be debated for centuries. (Pollack 31)

Henry’s daughters Mary and Elizabeth also altered the laws during their reigns. Mary repealed the laws in 1533 and 1544 because her legitimacy as the daughter of Catherine of Aragon depended on it. Elizabeth partially re-enacted them in 1588 to confirm her legitimacy as the daughter of Anne Boleyn. In 1560, the archbishop of Canterbury under Elizabeth I, Matthew Parker, drew up a Table of Kindred and Affinity to be publicly displayed in parish churches (Pollack 31). The Table was adopted into the church canons in 1603, and in 1662 was included in *The Book of Common Prayer* where it continued to be printed in various editions until the nineteenth century. “Purported to be a table of marriage prohibitions in accordance with ‘Scripture and our laws’,” the Table as Eileen Finan points out, went “beyond the Levitical degrees” (16). Mar Jonsson argues that the reformation theologians —whose work led to the Table—aimed to:

provide a rational basis for marriage laws in the regions dominated by a newly established faith. The Biblical text should define and shape society. Marriages within the degrees of relationships prohibited by God in Leviticus 18 were declared incestuous and forbidden. Sexual intercourse of partners within the same degrees was declared to be incest and considered a suitable cause for severe punishment, even execution. A study of the Protestant exegesis of Leviticus 18 shows how careful one should be in claiming any definite understanding of the historical meaning of incest. (854-855)

The starting point for the Protestant discussion of prohibited degrees was the words of God to Moses in Leviticus; therefore, Jonsson suggests that to understand incest before and including the eighteenth century some knowledge of Leviticus is necessary. He suggests that:

by the end of the eighteenth century the exegesis of Leviticus 18 was abandoned as a basis for the definition of incest and prohibited degrees of marriage . . . The influence of theological discourse on public affairs had declined to almost nothing and the secular construction of incest, which had its origins in speculations about natural law in the early seventeenth century, took over. Incest became what it currently is thought to be, that is the sexual intercourse of mother and son, father and daughter, and brother and sister. (862)

I would argue that it took at least a century for the changes in the definition to fully take place and even longer to have legal standing; nevertheless Jonsson's point is clear, modern interpretations of incest are not accurate for the long eighteenth century.

Pollack also looks at the influence of the ideas of natural law on defining incest in the long eighteenth century. She suggests that while Henry and his canonists had invoked the law of nature to justify a variety of "matrimonial prohibitions," the seventeenth-century:

writers challenged those arguments almost exclusively in negative terms—asserting typically that many affinal and consanguineous unions were *not contrary* to natural law—writers after 1700 became increasingly likely to invoke the authority of nature *positively* to vindicate varieties of close kindred marriages. At the



same time, those opposed to such marriages were increasingly *unlikely* to use nature as the measure of legitimacy. (*Incest and the English Novel* 39)

The writers were largely concerned with relationships such as first cousins and marriage to one's deceased wife's sister. Pollack traces the development of the debates in the period through theological and juridical writings as well as those appearing in the popular press, concluding that whatever the position of the arguer most agree that women "are the natural sexual property of men" (58).

Picking up on research by Polly Morris, Pollack argues that despite the ecclesiastical stance on incest, there existed "a popular definition" (Pollack 34) of incest that "was far less restrictive" (34) than the canonical definition that "distinguished very clearly between affinity and consanguinity" (34). Julie Shaffer warns:

definitions of relationships constituted as incestuous have shifted too often in British history from the sixteenth century on to allow us to believe that the taboo can in any simple way be either culturally stable or innate. (71)

In fact, Pollack shows how a seemingly fixed category of father-daughter incest can be expanded. In "Guarding the Succession of the (E)state: Guardian-Ward Incest and the dangers of representation in Delarivier Manley's *The New Atalantis*," she argues that changes to guardianship laws in the eighteenth century meant that relationships between guardians and wards could be interpreted as father-daughter relationships. Gothic fiction often contains the guardian-ward relationship figured as a father-daughter relationship.

### THE MARRIAGE EXCHANGE

The marriage exchange—the moment when a daughter is passed from her father to her husband and into her new family—is carried out through the marriage ceremony. This ceremony, symbolic of the exchange between the father

and the suitor or soon to be son-in-law follows, particularly in upper class and aristocratic families, months of negotiations about dowries and other financial transactions surrounding the marriage. R. B. Outhwaite emphasizes the continuing importance of hard-headed financial negotiations before a marriage in the long eighteenth century, negotiations that he suggests took place regardless of whether “romance” (21) initiated or concluded courtship. “Negotiators corresponded on behalf of their courting clients like solemn commercial diplomats, agreements were eventually formalized in private treaties—the marriage contract—and financial considerations seem frequently to override sentiment” (21). He suggests that :

Financial considerations intruded because marriage amongst the upper classes involved more than the union of two freely consenting marriageable parties; it also involved a complex and sizeable interchange of income and property between the families of these parties . . . The bride’s father supplied her with a dowry, her “portion”, usually a cash sum, which on the occasion of her marriage went to the groom’s family . . . In return for this portion, the groom or his family allotted the bride a “jointure”, land or an annuity from land which was to be possessed by the bride during, but only during, her widowhood. (22)

This view of marriage as a business is not only borne out in the literature of the time but is clearly depicted in William Hogarth’s series of paintings and engravings, “Marriage A-la-Mode.” The series of six works, created about 1745, “tells the story of two young people ill-suited to each other who are forced into marriage ordained to failure” (Shesgreen Plate 51). The series starts with the agreement over the marriage of the son of Earl Squander to the daughter of a wealthy mean city merchant, a marriage that eventually ends in the murder of the son and suicide of the daughter. The first engraving (**Figure 5**) depicts a crude commercial transaction between the fathers while the bride and groom sit back to back on a nearby couch (Shesgreen Plate 51). The rest of the series portrays the



**Figure 5**

couple's growing alienation from each other, their depravity in their idle lives, and eventually their deaths.

In a reading of the marriage ceremony, particularly the moment when the father hands over the daughter to the suitor, Lynda Boose argues that:

By making the father stand at the altar as witness that he knows of no impediments to his daughter's lawful union and by then forcing him to watch the priest place her hand into that of her husband, not only does the ceremony reaffirm the taboo against incest but it levels the full weight of that taboo on the relationship between the father and daughter. (69)

Boose draws on the work of Gayle Rubin who brings together notions of incest and marriage in her discussion of Levi-Strauss's and Freud's theories of incest in her article "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex." Rubin outlines the function of marriage as the outcome of the exchange of women to ensure the expansion of kinship groups or shore up political alliances. The taboo on incest then is part of the regulation of this exchange. Rubin argues that:

In pre-state societies, kinship is the idiom of social interaction, organizing economic, political and ceremonial, as well as sexual activity. One's duties, responsibilities and privileges vis-à-vis others are defined in terms of mutual kinship or lack thereof. The exchange of goods and services, production and distribution, hostility and solidarity, ritual and ceremony, all take place within the organizational structure of kinship. (169-170)

While kinship systems vary from culture to culture, women remain the item of exchange. Rubin finds two of Levi-Strauss's ideas "are particularly relevant to women—the 'gift' and the incest taboo, whose dual articulation adds up to this concept of the exchange of women" (171). For Levi-Strauss marriages are the most basic form of gift exchange. He argues that the incest taboo is the mechanism that ensures such exchanges take place between families and groups, and that the relationship established "is not just one of reciprocity, but one of kinship. The exchange partners have become affines, and their descendents will be related by blood" (Rubin 173). Boose expands upon this suggesting that:

although the daughter was clearly regarded as legal property inside the family, she has never been a commodity to be bartered in the same way as an ox or an ass. She is explicitly a *sexual* property acquired not by economic transaction but from the father's sexual expenditure and his own family bloodline—which makes the father's loss of her a distinctively personal loss of himself. Furthermore, since her worth as property is synonymous with her sexuality, retaining her is problematically invested in that same value . . . The very fact that culture has *needed* to impose a taboo to ensure an exogamous exchange of its daughters and the fact that it has evolved a ritual of husband-wife marriage that is primarily a father-daughter separation rite both suggest that the father-daughter relationship has no effective internal mechanisms for negotiating its dissolution. (46)

Boose suggests the daughter's movement across the "threshold" (46) towards marriage "threatens" (47) the father with "loss" (47)—such loss is found in the incest in two of the three texts I consider, Barker's *Exilius* and Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*. Boose suggests the "threshold" (46) status of daughters makes them problematic:

[R]etaining the daughter involves a figuratively if not literally incestuous choice that implicitly threatens to pollute the internal family space . . . Inevitably, the enclosure of the daughter resexualizes the space inside the family and compels the necessity for a detailed taboo to define illicit congress within it. (64)

She calls on the work of Victor Turner on “liminal *personae* (‘threshold people’)” (67) to consider the ambiguous position of daughters. He suggests that:

“ . . . liminal *personae* (‘threshold people’),” who “slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space . . . they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law.” Typically, such figures “may be represented as possessing nothing . . . Their behaviour is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint.” Liminal roles are inherently dual ones. They are “often regarded as dangerous, inauspicious, or polluting”; simultaneously, however, they are viewed as mysteriously sacred, peculiarly independent, and personifying the special power of the weak. (67)

Order is restored as soon as the “daughters have been incorporated into the socially legitimized role of wife/mother” (67). However, in incest texts, and particularly the three to be discussed, the daughters never attain that “legitimized role” (67) and the familial space becomes sexualised and polluted.

Interpreting incest in literature as recording the exchange of women and establishment of new kinship and familial alliances is useful for periods such as the long eighteenth century. At the time, incest was defined as connected to marriage and throughout the century debates raged about the nature of marriage and whether it should be contracted for reasons of business and family alliance or romantic love. Representations of the marriage exchange as alliance abound in literature before the twentieth century, but not afterwards. Exchanges are not a part of incest texts focused on child sexual abuse. This is because the abuse of children is not about finding a hidden desire for the daughter at the time of developing an alliance with another family; it is something altogether different.<sup>4</sup>

Only occasionally do literary representations after the nineteenth century image incest within the marriage exchange. One exception is the fiction of William Faulkner in which the backwardness of the American South is explained by its propensity for keeping its family alliances and hence bloodlines restricted. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner creates the figure and the idiot, Benjy, to make visible an inbreeding both biological and socially symbolic. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner makes a great point of the failed exchange. Although not strictly using the father-daughter relationship, the central daughter figure of Judith escapes the exchange to another's house when her brother shoots her prospective husband. Why? Not because he is the brother his father is happy to hand her to, but because he has black blood. Miscegenation rather than incest is the reason but the effect again is of a marriage exchange gone wrong. Throughout the entire text, Judith does not say a word. Her story is entirely told by others. Whether father or brother, the men of her family seal her fate. Her value and importance is as:

the blank shape, the empty vessel in which each of them [Henry and Charles] strove to preserve, not the illusion of himself nor his illusion of the other but what each conceived the other to believe him to be—the man and the youth, seducer and seduced, who had known one another, seduced and been seduced, victimized in turn each by the other, conqueror vanquished by his own strength, vanquished conquering his own weakness, before Judith came into their joint lives even by so much as girlname. (99)

Judith is not just an object of exchange, her most vital role is as mirror—she is the thing that both links the men and yet reflects their selves out to each other—a central but silent role.

### **THE MARRIAGE EXCHANGE IN LITERATURE OF THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

Marriage is a topic much under discussion in eighteenth-century literature, particularly that penned by women writers. As Boswell observed “there has



perhaps been no period when Marriage was more the general topick of conversation than at present” (Boone 58). The novels, poetry and drama address such issues as who should choose the marriage partner—the father or the daughter—should marriage be about love or family alliance, and what type of education should daughters be given to best prepare them for their role as wife and mother. The century saw an emergence in the ideal of, what historian Lawrence Stone calls, a “companionate marriage” (325). Rather than an alliance negotiated as a business arrangement between families, writers explored the notion that love be the basis of marriage—it was an era in which social and cultural movements and ideas were played out in the literature. Stone argues that as the ideal of the companionate marriage became more pronounced:

Mate selection was determined more by free choice than paternal decision and was based as much on expectations of lasting mutual affection as on calculations of an increase in money, status and power. Except in the highest aristocratic circles, the financial considerations of the dowry and the jointure became less decisive elements in marriage negotiations than the prospect of future, personal happiness based on settled and well-founded affection. (656)

Of course, the literature of the time warns of the dangers of not understanding the nature of true love and therefore young women making poor choices. Plenty of fathers are also portrayed as making poor and uninformed choices for their daughters. Mary, Lady Chudleigh sums up some of the concerns about marriage held by some in the early part of the century. She was less than enthusiastic about marriage in her 1703 poem “To the Ladies”:

Wife and servant are the same,  
But only differ in the name:  
For when that fatal knot is tied,  
Which nothing, nothing can divide,  
When she the word *Obe*y has said,  
And man by law supreme has made,  
Then all that’s kind is laid aside,

And nothing left but state and pride.  
 Fierce as an eastern prince he grows,  
 And all his innate rigour shows:  
 Then but to look, to laugh, or speak,  
 Will the nuptial contract break.  
 Like mutes, she signs alone must make,  
 And never any freedom take,  
 But still be governed by a nod,  
 And fear her husband as her god:  
 Him still must serve, him still obey,  
 And nothing act, and nothing say,  
 But what her haughty lord thinks fit,  
 Who, with the power, has all the wit.  
 Then shun, oh! shun that wretched state,  
 And all the fawning flatterers hate.  
 Value yourselves, and men despise:  
 You must be proud, if you'll be wise. (Lonsdale 3)

The anonymous 1733 poem "Woman's Hard Fate" encapsulates similar concerns:

How wretched is a woman's fate,  
     No happy change her fortune knows;  
 Subject to man in every state,  
     How can she then be free from woes?

In youth, a father's stern command  
     And jealous eyes control her will;  
 A lordly brother watchful stands  
     To keep her closer captive still.

The tyrant husband next appears,  
     With awful and contracted brow;  
 No more a lover's form he wears:  
     Her slave's become her sovereign now.

If from this fatal bondage free,  
     And not by marriage-chains confined,  
 But, blessed with single life, can see  
     A parent fond, a brother kind;

Yet love usurps her tender breast,  
     And pains a phoenix to her eyes:  
 Some darling youth disturbs her rest,  
     And painful sighs in secret rise.

Oh cruel powers, since you've designed  
     That man, vain man, should bear the sway,  
 To a slave's fetters add a slavish mind,  
     That I may cheerfully your will obey. (Lonsdale 136)



In contrast, Mary Savage, in “Letter to Miss E.B. on Marriage” (1777) (Lonsdale 348-349), wishes that Miss E. B. will find a “friend” as well “as mate” (348) in her marriage while Jane West’s “To a Friend on her Marriage, 1784” (Lonsdale 380-382), examines the confinement that comes with wifehood, the channelling of energy into the home before the transformation into the “faithful active wife” (381). But what seems at the outset a negative view of marriage becomes in the end an example to the nation:

Joy then, my Sally, since I see  
The path of wedlock trod by thee;  
Thy virtues shall secure the palm,  
Hymeneal friendship’s placid calm,  
And show to a too polished nation  
Example worthy imitation. (382)

In fiction, the key question was whether to marry for family fortune or private love. Lady Juliana in Susan Ferrier’s novel *Marriage* (1818) seeks love, “a man of my heart” (2), but her father the Earl of Courtland argues that she should seek a moneyed husband as he has no fortune to give her:

“The man of a fiddlestick!” exclaimed Lord Courtland in a fury; “what the devil have you to do with a heart, I should like to know! There’s no talking to a young woman now about marriage, but she is all in a blaze about hearts, and darts, and—and—But heark ye, child, I’ll suffer no daughter of mine to play the fool with her heart, indeed! She shall marry for the purpose for which matrimony was ordained amongst people of birth—that is, for the aggrandisement of her family, the extending of their political influence—for becoming, in short, the depository of their mutual interest. These are the only purposes for which persons of rank ever think of marriage. And pray what has your heart to say to that?”

“Nothing, papa,” replied Lady Juliana, in a faint dejected tone of voice. (2)

Lady Juliana ignores her father, marries for love, and is punished by a life of hardship and disappointment. The question of a suitable husband is a central theme in novels, particularly those written by women, reaching its height with Jane Austen’s texts. Whether the choice belongs to the daughter or the father, the

choice is often portrayed as problematic: Agnes Fitzhenry in Amelia Opie's *The Father and Daughter* is another daughter who chose badly while Turpius in Barker's *Exilius* makes a poor choice for his daughter Clarinthia.

Many texts deal with the moment leading up to the marriage exchange, debating along the way the makings of a suitable marriage. Mary Poovey argues that the moment where the daughter chooses her suitor or lover is tense and traumatic. Comparing Fanny Burney's *Evelina* and Mary Shelley's *Falkner* she argues that:

at least since the middle of the eighteenth century, as personal preference rather than parents' will has increasingly dictated the choice of a marriage partner, girls have enjoyed at least one moment of theoretical autonomy. The brief period of courtship, the moment at which a woman acquiesces to the imploring suitor or exercises her legitimate "negative," has seemed to signal her independence from her father's will and from her emotional fixation upon him. ("Fathers and Daughters" 39)

This moment, as the "daughter transfers her affection from her father to a lover" (39), she argues, is a time of conflict "between duty and inclination, between the behavior proper to a daughter and that demanded of an autonomous individual" (40). This conflict is necessary to "mark the threshold of adult identity, to separate the girl from the woman she struggles to become" (40). Thus, the daughter has become of marriageable age. Poovey argues that while the two texts she is concerned with raise this issue both "center the dilemma only to avoid it" (40). Incest texts, as I will show, confront this dilemma.

### **THE MARRIAGE EXCHANGE GOES WRONG**

What happens when the marriage exchange goes wrong and why does it go wrong? The marriage exchange can go wrong for a number of reasons but the two main ones are the daughter being abandoned before the exchange after having given into the sexual pressure of the suitor and thus becoming a "fallen woman"

and incest, the father's refusal to hand over the daughter because he wants to keep her for himself. The tension is felt in many works of literature when the daughter reaches marriageable age and at the time of the marriage exchange. The threat that the sexual will overbalance the possibility of the marriage exchange taking place is particularly prevalent in the Gothic fiction of the late eighteenth century but is there in less threatening ways throughout the novels that deal with the daughter of marriageable age. In many cases, the threat of incest is averted. But what happens when the exchange goes wrong and the daughter is retained within the domestic space? Concerns about sexual desire and power replace concerns about making a suitable marriage. In the three texts central to this thesis the marriage exchange goes wrong either at the point of negotiating a marriage alliance or just as the father realises that his daughter is of marriageable age.

In *Exilius, Or The Banish'd Roman* the father Turpius comes to desire his daughter Clarinthia sexually as he tries to negotiate a marriage alliance for her. He wants her to marry her half-brother Valerius, an alliance she rejects because it is incestuous. The marriage exchange goes wrong for two reasons—the father's suggested alliance is incestuous and, secondly, because the father tries to rape his daughter. Clarinthia's confusion over the attempted rape is increased by her attraction to the man who apparently killed her father while saving her. The incest occurs in Italy in a public space. Clarinthia is abducted from her bedroom in the family home by three masked men and taken to a nearby forest. Following the rape, she spends some time confined in Sicily at her step-mother's castle before escaping for adventures in Africa. Eventually she finds her way home to Italy where she is reunited with her father—who is not dead after all—and saviour/suitor.

In *The Cenci*, Francesco Cenci refuses to consider a marriage alliance for his daughter Beatrice equating a husband with freedom from him, freedom he does not want her to have. Cenci does not sexually desire Beatrice as Turpius does Clarintha but rather sees sex as another way of controlling her. He comes to the realisation that he has another weapon, rape, when he acknowledges that she is of marriageable age. Therefore, the marriage exchange goes wrong because the father refuses to undertake “normal” fatherly step and arrange a familial alliance through the marriage of his daughter. He rapes her in the familial and domestic space of the family’s Roman home but in her chamber away from the rest of the family. Once that has occurred Cenci removes the family to the isolated Castle of Petrella where he can more effectively silence Beatrice as she struggles to articulate his deed.

In *Mathilda*, the unnamed father realises that he loves and desires his daughter when a suitor appears. Rather than deny his feelings and desires and offer Mathilda’s hand in marriage, he banishes the suitor and removes her to the countryside where he alone has her company while he tries to overcome his desire. Thus, the father’s desire for Mathilda means that the marriage exchange never takes place. The incest declaration in *Mathilda* is made in the parklands of the family property in Yorkshire with the father later approaching Mathilda’s bedroom door bringing the incestuous threat into the family home. The text features a number of settings. Mathilda grows up in Scotland on the shores of Loch Lomond. When her father returns they spend time in London where he becomes aware of his incestuous feelings. After his declaration Mathilda follows her father to the seaside, a place not named, where he suicides. She returns to London with her family before exiling herself on the Northern heaths of England

where she tries to come to terms with her fall from innocence and with her own love for her father.

In the next section, Part I, I introduce the figure of the daughter of marriageable age and her place in her domestic space, exploring her responses to her father's incestuous actions, which pollute the familial space and threaten the future of the family.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The age of consent in Britain remained at twelve for females until 1875 when it was raised to thirteen. It then became 16 in 1885 (Jackson 3).

<sup>2</sup> This makes it quite different to twentieth and twenty-first century notions that connect incest with child abuse. The leading texts on understanding incest as child sexual abuse are Judith Herman's *Father-Daughter Incest* and Elizabeth Ward's *Father-Daughter Rape*. For further information on the feminist notions of incest as abuse and the history of child sexual abuse see also Sue Clegg, "Studying Child Sexual Abuse: Morality or Science"; Barry M. Coldrey, "The Sexual Abuse of Children: The Historical Perspective"; Brenda Daley, *Authoring a Life: A Woman's Survival in and through Literacy Studies*; Lloyd De Mause, "The History of Child Abuse," *The Journal of Psychiatry*; Anna Fairtlough, *Responsibility for Incest*; Susan Forward and Craig Buck, *Betrayal of Innocence: Incest and Its Devastation*; Ian Hacking, "The Making and Molding of Child Abuse"; Mary Hamer, *Incest: A New Perspective*; Miriam Harris, ed., *Rape, battery, incest! Writing out the pain*; Penelope Hetherington, ed., *Incest and the Community: Australian Perspectives*; Blair Justice and Rita Justice, *The Broken Taboo: Sex in the Family*; Mike Lew, *Victims No Longer: A Guide for Men Recovering from Sexual Child Abuse*; Jenny Marsh, *Stepping Out: Incest Info for Girls*; Alice Miller, "The Political Consequences of Child Abuse"; Sarah Nelson, *Incest, Fact, and Myth*; and Jean Renvoise, *Incest: A Family Pattern*.

<sup>3</sup> Pollack's text is the only book-length discussion of incest in eighteenth-century literature. It contributes important detail for understanding the debates on incest in the period leading up to and including the long eighteenth century. Her case studies are Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister*, Delarivier Manley's *The New Atalantis*, Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. She deals largely with brother-sister incest narratives although the Manley calls on her to discuss the guardian-ward relationship, often interpreted as a father-daughter relationship but not operating as does the biological father-daughter incest in my three chosen texts. She explores incest representations in light of gender and contemporary incest theory, and the emergence of the modern family, in particular that "the historical realignment of the categories of class, kinship and representation" in this period highlights incest as "a peculiarly dense transfer point between two overlapping but distinct forms of cultural power" (17). She argues that: "incest narratives of the long eighteenth century work both to articulate and to obscure the ideological contradictions occasioned by the shift from patriarchal to 'egalitarian' models of familial order" (17). Her aim is to identify and explore "the distinct role that incest came to play within an emerging modern episteme" (26). Her readings "demonstrate that incest functions as a site both for the production and for the critique of gendered subjectivity within this emergent cultural formation" (26). In fact, she argues that the findings of the "sciences of man" which "did not come into their own until well into the nineteenth century" were "already in the process of formation" in the eighteenth century in the writings of jurists, moral philosophers, theologians and writers of fiction. Unlike this thesis, with the exception of her discussion of *Moll Flanders* who marries her brother, her focus is on the "tabooed possibilities" rather than the expression of actual incest. Beyond Pollack's text a number of articles deal with the better-known individual incest narratives such as Delarivier Manley's *The New Atalantis*, Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, works by Henry and Sarah Fielding, Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story*, Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, and Gothic texts such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (see articles by Martin Battestin, Jill Campbell, Irene Fizer, Susan Allen Ford, Giles Mitchell, Terry Nickel, Ellen Pollack, and Joanna E. Rapf). Incest narratives in general are identified as belonging to three distinct moments within the long eighteenth century—works from the first half of the century, Gothic texts and Romantic texts. The majority of the articles deal with Romantic visions of incest which as Ellen Pollack argues have become dominant in the understanding of incest in all periods of literature even though incest functions differently in texts of other eras. General discussions on incest are found in articles by Margaret Doody, T.G.A. Nelson, Ruth Perry, Alan Richardson, Julie Shaffer, Eugene Stelzig, Peter Thorslev, and Daniel Wilson. Among the book-length discussions of incest in literary works, aside from Pollack's, are Otto Rank's *The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend* (1912), Donald Webster Cory and R.E.L. Master's *Violation of Taboo: Incest in the Great Literature of the Past and Present* (1963), Glenda A. Hudson's *Sibling Love and Incest in Jane Austen's Fiction* (1972), James B. Twitchell's *Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture* (1987), Jane M. Ford's *Patriarchy and Incest from Shakespeare to Joyce* (1998), and Elizabeth Barnes's *Incest and the Literary Imagination* (2002). Rank's 1912 book is a general survey of incest in language and literature and taking a Freudian perspective tends to relate incest in the author's work to the author's life and collapses all incest relationships into subcategories of

parent-child incest. However, it begins the debate about incest in literature and features the works of a number of writers from the long eighteenth century including Percy Bysshe Shelley, Byron, Schiller, and Goethe. Cory and Masters also provide a survey book whereas Hudson is concerned with reading Austen's texts through an incest lens and largely in light of sibling incest. Twitchell is largely concerned with the exploration of incest in stories of the nineteenth-century fictional family and how that has affected notions of incest in the contemporary western world. Ford applies Freudian incest theory to the literature of Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Henry James, Joseph Conrad and James Joyce and in much the same way that Rank does. Barnes provides a collection of views on incest portrayals in a range of works spanning middle english to contemporary works. The topic is also touched on in other books such as Gonda's *Reading Daughters' Fictions* and George Haggerty's *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Late Eighteenth Century* but is not the sole focus of these books.

<sup>4</sup> Categorising incest stories is not straightforward. Early incest stories can be found in *The Bible* and in Greek and Roman legends and from there on are present throughout literature of almost every age. R.E.L Masters charts the early incest stories from Greek and Roman Mythology such as the stories of Zeus, Coelus, Oedipus, along with the stories of mythologies of the Egyptian, Verdic, Japanese, Roumanians and Incas and stories from the Old Testament. Margaret Doody shows in *The True History of the Novel*, that there were many incest stories, particularly father-daughter incest stories, in the ancient novel. It is possible to argue also that at different times, incest narratives are used for different purposes. For example in the Gothic period, incest was used to shock the reader and in detective fiction it is a motive for murder. In women's literature it is an attempt to turn unspeakable into speakable and in American literature brother-sister incest is used as a symbol of a declining society, a desire to keep an inward turning structure rather than moving to a healthier democratic and open model. But what does a story have to contain to be considered an incest narrative—a symbol of incest, an actual incest scene or “unnatural” bonding between family members or is it something else entirely? In this case I mean “unnatural” to be socially unacceptable and therefore labeled “unnatural.” Does the incest have to be central to make a story into an incest narrative? If this is the case, what do we feel, for example, about Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*? Does Victor's incestuous dream about his mother make it into an incest narrative or is it just a vital clue to character? If it is a vital clue to character, is it then an incest narrative? Or do we believe we have an incest narrative when we read in the first few pages of Victoria Glendinning's novel *Electricity*, of Charlotte's father who wants his eighteen-year-old daughter to sit on his knee? Should we interpret this as incestuous feelings or merely as an old man wanting to remember what it was like to be loved by his daughter when she was little because as Charlotte tells us she too used to enjoy the games they played? The reader immediately feels the sexuality in this scene but there is little later in the narrative to suggest it went any further than just being games between father and daughter.

# PART I

## CHAPTER ONE: THE DAUGHTER

While yet within her father's house, a daughter is set apart from the other three members [the father, the mother and the son] as the only one who does not participate in extending its integrity into history. When her patronymic identity as daughter is exchanged for one that marks her as wife, she is still the alien until she has once again changed her sign to "mother of new members of the lineage"—which by implication means mother to a son. (Boose 22)

This section will argue that the domestic space is most dangerous for daughters when they reach marriageable age. The very sexuality that alerts fathers to the fact that they are ready for marriage is what places them in harm's way. As Lynda Boose points out the daughter occupies an unusual space within the family and home, and when she has reached marriageable age, she is in a liminal moment. Her future does not lie with the family she was born into; instead, the daughter must pass across the threshold of her family to become part of another family and eventually mother to its heirs. Thus as Rubin argues the daughter is the gift in a marriage exchange (171); her passing from one family to the next assures kinship and alliance vital in a time such as the long eighteenth century where social standing was established and maintained through marriage.

What happens when incest compromises the marriage exchange? I will argue that incest pollutes the daughter and the space of the home and family and threatens to destroy it. Within the three texts explored in this thesis, the domestic implications of father-daughter incest are articulated by the figure of the daughter of marriageable age. *Exilius, Or The Banish'd Roman*, *The Cenci* and *Mathilda* are the only three texts I have found in the long eighteenth century in which the daughter speaks of incest involving her biological father.<sup>1</sup> In *Exilius* and



*Mathilda*, the daughters mediate the fathers' voices. Mathilda controls the entire narrative in the eponymous novel while an unidentified narrator tells the latter part of Turpius's story in *Exilius*. Importantly, Clarinthia controls the telling of the attempted rape. In *The Cenci*, however, Cenci has his own strong and dominating voice, taking the stage just as Beatrice does. Despite the daughters being the main speakers, I argue that the texts establish their powerlessness: their voices do not command the same attention as those of the fathers.

The chapter is divided into three parts—the daughter of marriageable age, the incest and responses to the incest. The first part will examine how each daughter is located within her familial space in order to understand her voice and the impact of the incest on her and the family space. The second part focuses on the incest itself—attempted rape in *Exilius*, rape in *The Cenci*, and a declaration of incestuous desire in *Mathilda*. I will argue that the three texts use strikingly similar language to describe the experience of incest. The site where the incest takes place varies. When the incest occurs within the domestic space, the entire family becomes “polluted.” The third part explores the daughter's responses to incest. Incest completely alters the lives of these daughters of marriageable age, transforming their familial and familiar domestic space into places of danger and horror. Clarinthia is the only one who has the possibility of happiness beyond an incest attack and this is largely due to another male figure, her suitor Asiaticus. Incest destroys Beatrice's and Mathilda's lives and families.

In their final resolutions, the three texts offer their daughters quite different futures. Clarinthia is saved in the end, although she remains dependent on other people to keep her alive. Asiaticus saves her from the attempted rape, the sailor saves her from drowning by tying her to a plank after Lysander's ship

begins to sink, and Exilius and Ismenus save her from being burned alive after being sentenced to death in Africa. Her virtuousness and filial obedience make her worthy of saving and are an essential part of making her a worthy wife to Asiaticus. They also are important for the Jacobite arguments of the novel, which will be discussed in later chapters. Beatrice takes control of her life by trading her victim status for that of murderer. Within the play, murder is her only solution if she wishes to escape further rape and torture inflicted by her father. She struggles to articulate the rape but at the same time, she is wary of speaking out too much. She wants to protect Bernardo. In a strange way, her actions, including the murder, lead to a reinstatement of domestic values at the end of the play and provide Bernardo with a future. Mathilda's story is of a fall. Her father's declaration of incestuous desire takes her from innocence to a world of knowledge. All her innocent statements about her love for her father suddenly take on new meaning and become tinged with the sexual, a new part of her knowledge. With the fall comes only the possibility of death. Mathilda is burdened by her new knowledge and unable to overcome the effects of the fall. Her innocence cannot be restored.

### **THE DAUGHTER OF MARRIAGEABLE AGE**

This section will be divided into four parts—establishing the daughter; the familial space; early life, education and familial relationships; and filial obedience—which examine the figure of the daughter, Clarinthia in *Exilius*, Beatrice in *The Cenci* and Mathilda in the eponymous novel. All three daughters are from wealthy families but their positions within the families vary: Clarinthia is Turpius's only legitimate child with her half-brother Turpius the product of her father's adulterous affair, Beatrice is one of six children and Mathilda is an only

child. The biological mother has been removed from all texts, indicating that the motherless daughter is most at risk. The stepmother in *The Cenci* is powerless as protector although she is motherly in many ways. The removal of the mother also impacts on the daughter's education, which again varies in the texts. Two of the texts—*Exilius* and *The Cenci*—are particular about the need for filial obedience, the importance of the father's word and obeying that word. In *Mathilda*, filial obedience is not as central; however, a lack of filial obedience partly leads to Mathilda's downfall. Understanding the situation of the daughter, her education and family relationships provides an insight into her responses in the face of incest.

### ESTABLISHING THE DAUGHTER

Clarinthia, Mathilda and Beatrice are quickly established in their texts as daughters and as members of wealthy families. Clarinthia's and Beatrice's marriageable status is documented from the outset whereas Mathilda's is not discussed until Chapter 3. Clarinthia's and Mathilda's positions within their families are also acknowledged almost from the outset of their narratives. In comparison, the familial relationships take longer to establish in *The Cenci*. Three of the Cenci children—the unnamed daughter, Christofano and Rocco—never appear in the play although they are mentioned. Of the three that appear—Giacomo, Beatrice, and Bernardo—Giacomo is the last to be introduced in Act 2, Scene 2.

Clarinthia opens her tale by stating her name and position—she is “Daughter to Turpius . . . the sole lawful Heiress of all his great Riches” (I: 24). However, she is a daughter who is ashamed of her father because of the “Irregularity of his Life” and neither his “large Possessions” nor “the Weight of

his Riches” can compensate for the “Infamy of his Actions,” most of which are well known “to all the world” (I: 24). Clarinthia is agonising over her reprobate father’s plans to marry her—an acknowledgement that she is of marriageable age—to his bastard son and her only sibling, her half-brother Valerius. Such a marriage would give the son legitimacy in the family and enable him to inherit the father’s wealth.

Beatrice is established as a daughter not through her own words but in a conversation between her father Francesco Cenci and Cardinal Camillo in the opening scene of the play. Camillo inquires after Cenci’s wife and “gentle daughter” (1.1.43) describing her as having “sweet looks, which make all things else / Beauteous and glad” (1.1.44-45). Like Clarinthia, Beatrice is from a wealthy family, also headed by a reprobate father whose immorality is established immediately as he and Cardinal Camillo discuss paying the church to have Cenci’s crimes “hushed up” (1.1.1). Beatrice’s marriageable status is clear in her first appearance in Act 1, Scene 2, when she says she no longer believes it possible for her to marry because she cannot abandon her stepmother Lucretia and young brother Bernardo. Camillo notes that Beatrice is a daughter of marriageable age who has been “barred from all society” (1.1.46). When Camillo asks Cenci why she is hidden away, Cenci’s response is to threaten him:

One thing, I pray you, recollect henceforth,  
And so we shall converse with less restraint.  
A man you knew spoke of my wife and daughter:  
He was accustomed to frequent my house;  
So the next day *his* wife and daughter came  
And asked if I had seen him; and I smiled:  
I think they never saw him any more. (1.1.59-65)

Clearly, Cenci will not accept any discussion of Beatrice and the rest of the family. As Camillo does not pursue the matter, the power of Cenci's words and voice are underscored.

Unlike Clarinthia, whose only sibling is an illegitimate brother, Beatrice is one of six Cenci siblings. Two—Giacomo and Bernardo—share the stage with her during the play. The others are only mentioned: her brothers Cristofano and Rocco are declared dead at the banquet (1.3.43-44; 1.3.55-64) and an unnamed older sister who is now married is mentioned by Cenci when he and Lucretia discuss whether Beatrice should also be married (4.1.24-25). Although the family is wealthy, Beatrice has no access to that wealth. In fact, Cenci will do whatever it takes to keep the wealth for himself. He does not intend to share it with his sons, let alone his daughters. Part of Beatrice's powerlessness in Act 5 is that she cannot use the family wealth as he does to buy her way out of her crimes.

Mathilda too is of high social standing: "I was born in England. My father was a man of rank: he had lost his father early, and was educated by a weak mother with all the indulgence she thought due to a nobleman of wealth" (176). Her father may not be an out and out villain like the other two fathers, but the reference to his indulged upbringing casts doubt over his moral steadfastness. Mathilda's status as marriageable is established later than in the other two texts because Mathilda as narrator tells her father's and mother's story before focusing back on her own. Unlike Clarinthia and Beatrice, Mathilda is given a specific age. She is "not yet twenty" (228) by the time she is telling her story, and she was sixteen when her father returned to her life having absented himself just after her birth. She is the only child of her father's marriage to Diana. Her marriageability is not confirmed until the end of chapter three and beginning of chapter four

where Mathilda discusses the regular visits of a “young man of rank” (191) who spent time with her and her father until his “obnoxious visits suddenly ceased” (191). Unlike the other two daughters, Mathilda does have some access to her family wealth but relinquishes that wealth when she goes into exile after her father’s suicide.

### THE FAMILIAL SPACE

All three texts separate domestic and public space. The domestic and familial space that Clarinthia shares with her father Turpius and half-brother Valerius is not clearly defined in *Exilius*; however, it is a confining space. The fact that she is forced to listen to her father’s incestuous plans within this space and is abducted from her bedroom makes the domestic arena unsafe. Clarinthia is not just confined within her own home; later her father’s mistress and Valerius’s mother Asbella will lock her in a room in Asbella’s castle in Sicily. The castle is a polluted space, not by incest this time but by adultery. Contrasting with these polluted domestic spaces, is the public space of the rape—to be discussed later—and the home of Publius Scipio with its extensive grounds and gardens. Here appropriate behaviour and decorum take precedence, as a strong and virtuous family is reunited. New blood, in the way of marriage partners, is proposed for the family.

Again the familial space in *The Cenci* is confining with Beatrice and Lucretia having little access to the wider social world. In comparison, the male figures, even Beatrice’s younger brother Bernardo, are able to come and go from the family home. The only glimpse of the outside or social world, before the courtroom scenes, is during the banquet. Yet, while members of the public enter the banquet room in the Cenci home, it is only the male figures who may pass in

and out of this space from the domestic to the public. The female figures retreat from the semi-public/domestic space of the banquet room back into the family rooms. At the Castle of Petrella, the family is even more isolated and the castle has even more confined and hidden spaces, such as the dungeons, where Cenci may torture Beatrice. Even at the end when Beatrice and Lucretia are in the courtroom and later the prison, being on trial means that they are again confined. The courtroom represents the public sphere, the law, but it offers wives and daughters no freedoms.

*Mathilda* features a range of familial spaces. Mathilda's childhood familial space is her aunt's Scottish property on the shores of Loch Lomond. Here she not only has use of the house but is free to roam the parklands. Although Mathilda cannot venture outside this larger parkland, she is not as confined as Beatrice was within the walls of a building. The London home where Mathilda and her father stay barely registers in the novel, but the family home in Yorkshire is described in sufficient detail to give the reader a clear picture of a stately English home. Its size is also signified when her father approaches her bedroom and she talks of her father having no need to be in this part of the house. The domestic interiors are not as important in *Mathilda* as are the parklands and garden enclosures extending outward from the houses. Mathilda's moods and emotions are often reflected through her relationship with the landscape. In comparison to the large family home where things go awry, Mathilda retreats to a small cottage on the English moors. Here she abandons all the trappings and signs of wealth that become her status. Again she spends time outside in the wilderness surrounding her cottage although she no longer feels sustained by nature as she did before her father's return.

## EARLY LIFE, EDUCATION AND FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

None of the three texts features a biological mother, reinforcing the lack of protection for the daughter within the domestic space. Clarinthia knew and was educated by her mother, Mathilda's mother died just after she was born, while Beatrice's dead mother is replaced by a stepmother, Lucretia, who is unable to protect Beatrice from her father. Details of the daughter's childhood are sparse in *Exilius*, almost non-existent in *The Cenci*, but quite extensive in *Mathilda*, even though she claims there is not much to say about her childhood. The few details included in *Exilius* go to explaining Clarinthia's "virtuous" character, which demonstrates that she is worthy of being saved by Asiaticus. It matters little about Beatrice's childhood because there is nothing she can do to avoid her father's incestuous actions. He is in complete control. In *Mathilda*, the narrator sees the biographical detail as essential to presenting her overall story. And for the reader, understanding Mathilda and what she chooses to tell provides essential insight into her responses to incest.

### CLARINTHIA

Clarinthia's voice is the second heard in *Exilius* but while she tells the first part of her story, the second part or African adventure is narrated by the male figure Ismenus, also known as the young Scipio and forecast to be Scipio Africanus, the great African conqueror of the novel's future. Having established herself as Turpius's daughter, Clarinthia reminisces about her childhood and her friend Scipiana (who the reader has already met as the cousin of Clelia and listener to Clelia's story, the first told in the novel) and Scipiana's brother Asiaticus, later revealed as Clarinthia's suitor. She describes her early love for Asiaticus and tells the story of his family—his mother's death, the loss of his brother, and the



banishment of his father's great friend Catullus. Clarinthia laments the loss of Scipiana and Asiaticus from her life: Scipiana's father took her to the country where he went to grieve for his wife, and Asiaticus went to Athens to study. Her early association with the upstanding family of Publius Scipio reinforces her virtuous nature. Remaining in Rome after their departure, Clarinthia applied herself to her "Devoirs" (I: 26), duties set out by her mother, until her mother's death shattered her happiness and brought calamities into her life. Clarinthia's mother is not described beyond being called a "virtuous and honourable Parent" (I: 26). There are no details about Clarinthia's education although her father complains that her "customary education" and the teachings of her mother had "infused into my Fancy" the "chimera" of "Deities" (I: 28). He objects to her moral gaze on the world. Education is discussed in relation to Scipiana in a way that reflects on all daughters in the novel. On her father's retirement to the country, Scipiana filled her time with reading and study:

I made a Study of Philosophy, the *Greek* and Oriental Tongues, my Business and Diversion. How far this is suitable to our Sex I dare not pretend to determine, the Men having taken Learning for their Province, we must not touch upon its Borders without being suppos'd Usurpers; however, since it did not displease my Father, I regret not those Moments I bestow'd in its Service, but think 'em still my own, and not slip'd with the rest of my Life's Actions into the Abyss of Time past, which returns no more, but are always present, or at least the Product of those Moments, to wit, the good Morals I learn'd, they are always at my Command. 'Tis probable, if Fortune had provided me a more publick Station, I had employ'd my Time otherwise, but in this Retirement with my Father, I cou'd not find a more agreeable Entertainment. (I: 76)

Presumably, Clarinthia's education did not extend as far as Scipiana's. If it had it would have been a problem for Asiaticus who declared in relation to his sister, in one of the most quoted passages from the novel, that "a learned Lady is as ridiculous as a spinning Hercules" (I: 79).

Until her mother's death, as a wealthy heiress Clarinthia was being prepared and educated as a virtuous and moral daughter expecting to marry within her station. She had associated with other upstanding families of her rank and all seemed harmonious within the family. As soon as her mother died the familiar in Clarinthia's domestic world was shattered. Suddenly she had to deal first with the prospect of marrying her "bastard" (I: 26) half-brother Valerius, then with the incestuous passion of her father, and finally with the fact that she believed she had caused her father's death.

### BEATRICE

The harmony in Clarinthia's home while her mother was alive is in direct contrast to the Cenci household, which Beatrice describes as a "home of misery" (1.2.16) in her opening conversation with Orsino. Beatrice once thought to marry Orsino and leave her father's home but her love "turned to bitter pain" (1.2.21) when he broke their "youthful contract" (1.2.22) and took his priestly vows. Although marriage should still be a possibility she feels her chances blighted by the problems within the family. To leave would be to abandon Lucretia and Bernardo. She says:

May the ghost  
Of my dead mother plead against my soul,  
If I abandon her who filled the place  
She left, with more, even, than a mother's love. (2.1.94-97)

Beatrice is a "wretch" with a "weight of melancholy thoughts" (1.2.36) and predicts her situation will only get worse. To this point, there is no explanation for Beatrice's unhappiness, other than conclusions drawn from the display of Cenci's nature in the opening scenes.

Nothing is known of Beatrice's education and virtually nothing of her mother other than when Beatrice talks of Lucretia filling her dead mother's place

and when Cenci curses her for being in the image of her mother. Lucretia is motherly but is unable to protect Beatrice and Bernardo from their father. Instead, Beatrice is the family protector, as much as this is possible. For example, at the banquet Lucretia faints while Beatrice challenges her father. Lucretia later recognises that Beatrice has “ever stood / Between us and your father’s moody wrath / Like a protecting presence: your mind / Has been our only refuge and defence” (2.1.46-49). Lucretia has more than filled the mother’s role in Beatrice’s and Bernardo’s eyes but she is ever aware that she is not their biological mother: “though I love you as my own, / I am not your true mother” (2.1.6-7). Lucretia feels inadequate that she can no longer protect Beatrice and Bernardo as she did when they were younger. When Lucretia does try to stand up against Cenci asking him to leave Beatrice alone and to find her a husband, she is timid and withers under Cenci’s glance, reinforcing the powerlessness of the female figures against the patriarch. It will take the assistance of a male, Orsino, for mother and daughter to overcome the persecuting patriarchal figure in their lives, but in the end it is to no avail because in the courtroom other patriarchal figures simply replace him.

Lucretia’s main function is to reflect on Beatrice’s behaviour and speeches. Although this is most important after the rape in Act 3, it is the situation from early in the play. Following the banquet in Act 2, Scene 1, Lucretia tries to understand Beatrice as she rages about her father and reacts to the return, unopened, of the petition she has sent to the Pope. It is through Lucretia that the reader<sup>2</sup> sees Beatrice:

How pale you look! You tremble, and you stand  
 Wrapped in some fixed and fearful meditation,  
 As if one thought were over strong for you:  
 Your eyes have a chill glare; O, dearest child!  
 Are you gone mad? If not, pray, speak to me. (2.1.29-33)

Lucretia cannot cope with Beatrice's silence; she keeps calling for explanations but Beatrice does not reply to Lucretia's questions about what her father did to her after the feast. Bernardo then joins Lucretia in begging for an explanation about why Beatrice does not seem herself. Finally, Beatrice begins to speak slowly at first, with a forced calmness, then more wildly, until a litany of complaints against Cenci pours out:

Oh! he has trampled me  
Under his feet, and made the blood stream down  
My pallid cheeks. And he has given us all  
Ditch-water, and the fever-stricken flesh  
Of buffaloes, and bade us eat or starve,  
And we have eaten. He has made me look  
On my beloved Bernardo, when the rust  
Of heavy chains has gangrened his sweet limbs,  
And I have never yet despaired—but now!  
What would I say?

[Recovering herself.

Ah! No, 'tis nothing new.  
The sufferings we all share have made me wild:  
He only struck and cursed me as he passed;  
He said, he looked, he did,—nothing at all  
Beyond his wont, yet it disordered me. (2.1.64-77)

She will not admit here why she feels even more trampled or “disordered.” She seems to be holding back: “Ah! No, ’tis nothing new.” Beatrice’s recitation of Cenci’s previous tortures leaves the reader with a sense of foreboding. The madness and anger and then the calmness that comes with recovering herself are indicative of the fact that she feels powerless, a powerlessness that she will overcome later by participating in her father’s murder. Beatrice wants to rage against the injustices but she knows her avenues for help are closing—her petition to the Pope was returned unopened and no one at the banquet responded to her calls for help despite their own horror at Cenci’s actions. This wildness at the “sufferings” (2.1.74) but an inability to articulate her sense of foreboding is an

early indication of the silences and the inadequacies of words that will come later in the play.

After the rape, Lucretia continues in this role of trying to aid Beatrice's articulation of events through questions and by reinforcing changes in her. For example:

She [Beatrice] answers not:  
Her spirit apprehends the sense of pain,  
But not its cause; suffering has dried away  
The source from which it sprung.  
(3.1.33-36)

Here Lucretia shows Beatrice in pain but not knowing or not being able to articulate the source of her pain. Later:

Thou art unlike thyself; thine eyes shoot forth  
A wandering and strange spirit. Speak to me,  
Unlock those pallid hands whose fingers twine  
With one another. (3.1.81-84)

Beatrice's behaviour is unusual and she is agitated, as shown in her twining of her fingers. And:

Oh! My lost child,  
Hide not in proud impenetrable grief  
Thy sufferings from my fear. (3.1.104-106)

Beatrice's response to this final comment is that she does not hide her grief and suffering. Lucretia does not seem to understand what Beatrice is trying to tell her. It is not clear whether she does not understand or does not want to understand. What is clear is that Beatrice's behaviour is markedly different—there is a greater sense of pain. She seems to wander aimlessly, wringing her hands, and Lucretia cannot get to the crux of the matter. I would argue that unlike Beatrice's earlier refraining from speaking in Act 2, in these cases she is struggling to articulate the rape.

There is only one moment in the play where Lucretia takes control of her situation—the moment she gives Cenci opiate to make him sleep so the murder can

take place. Soon again she becomes faint and distressed when Legate Savella arrives with a warrant for Cenci's arrest and she is concerned that their deed may be discovered. Beatrice tells her to be "bold":

The deed is done,  
And what may follow now regards me not.  
I am as universal as the light;  
Free as the earth-surrounding air; as firm  
As the world's centre. Consequence, to me,  
Is as the wind which strikes the solid rock,  
But shakes it not. (4.4.46-52)

Cenci's murder gives Beatrice some measure of release and she feels the others should feel this as well. But Lucretia is agitated and faints again when Savella orders them to go with him to Rome to answer to the Pope. Lucretia barely speaks in Act 5 although she is present in a number of scenes. In Scene 3 she implores Beatrice to speak the truth so they may all die quickly and face God their judge (5.3.55-57). She fears their "dreadful end" (5.3.107). Again, Beatrice is the strong one comforting Lucretia through song. Lucretia's final words are to hope that the pardon Bernardo seeks from the Pope will be granted. Her final words of hope echo her opening words of hope. She does not seem to have changed much throughout the play but is instrumental in showing the reader the changes in Beatrice and reinforcing Beatrice's desire, firstly to escape Cenci, and secondly, to protect Bernardo.

### MATHILDA

Mathilda is an only child who lives with her aunt in Scotland. She has no siblings, no mother and no father in her formative years. Mathilda declares she does not have much to say about her childhood; instead, she will focus on a number of important associations and events. Yet, her childhood is extremely important in establishing the patterns through which her reaction to her father's

incestuous act can be understood. Although Mathilda did not know her mother, Diana, who died a few days after her birth, she knows her story. Diana was one of three daughters of a gentleman of small fortune (178). She was beautiful, “her understanding was clear and strong and her disposition angelically gentle” (178). At eleven, Mathilda’s father was talking the language of love to Diana, who though aged thirteen did not understand him. Diana is of marriageable age but Mathilda’s father is still only a boy yet her education made her seem more childish than Mathilda’s father “at least in the knowledge and the expression of feeling; she received his warm protestations with innocence, and returned them unknowing of what they meant” (178). This age disparity and the fact that he is just a boy, alerts the reader to the fact that their relationship does not have a solid foundation and goes against normal structures. Their passion grew as they did but their love was a secret, another problematic aspect of their relationship. Mathilda describes Diana as “worthy of his deepest affection” (178). She had a “pure” heart, a “real humbleness of soul” (178) and had lived a “retired life” (179). Her education is compared to that of Mathilda’s father:

She was well acquainted with the heroes of Greece and Rome or with those of England who had lived some hundred years ago, while she was nearly ignorant of the passing events of the day: she had read few authors who had written during at least the last fifty years but her reading with this exception was very extensive. Thus although she appeared to be less initiated in the mysteries of life and society than he, her knowledge was of a deeper kind and laid on firmer foundations. (179)

Her education was superior to Mathilda’s father’s schooling. As well as being more extensive, her knowledge was deeper, “laid on firmer foundations,” despite not being up to date. Mathilda’s father saw Diana as his “guide” in life as somehow completing his being. This will be the same way Mathilda initially sees

her father when he returns to her life. This notion of Diana completing Mathilda's father's life becomes truer when they married:

Diana filled up all his heart: he felt as if by his union with her he had received a new and better soul. She was his monitress as he learned what were the true ends of life. It was through her beloved lessons that he cast off his old pursuits and gradually formed himself to become one among his fellow men; a distinguished member of society, a Patriot; and an enlightened lover of truth and virtue.—He loved her for her beauty and for her amiable disposition but he seemed to love her more for what he considered her superior wisdom. They studied, they rode together; they were never separate and seldom admitted a third to their society. (179-180)

As will be shown more clearly in the section on the father, all that Diana inspires in Mathilda's father is lost when she dies and he reverts to his old patterns of self-indulgence and a life of excesses.

After the death of her mother, Mathilda's father leaves her in the care of her aunt, a cold woman, "totally incapable of any affection" (182). Her aunt, who had never married and who only looked after Mathilda because it was her "duty" (182), did not like being disturbed by childish prattle. She took Mathilda to live on the shores of Loch Lomond in Scotland despite Mathilda's father's request that she live in the family mansion near Richmond in Yorkshire. A servant of Mathilda's mother's looked after her from a baby to seven and she only saw her aunt twice a day, "at stated hours" (182). "She never caressed me, and seemed all the time I stayed in the room to fear that I should annoy her by some childish freak" (182). Mathilda's aunt's inability to love parallels Mathilda's own inability to love later in the novel, just as her retreat from society resembles her aunt's move to Scotland away from all the trappings of English society.



The only love given to Mathilda came from her nurse, who let her run wild about the property and neighbouring fields. She loved everything in the environment with a passion:

I believe that I bore an individual attachment to every tree in our park; every animal that inhabited it knew me and I loved them. Their occasional deaths filled my infant heart with anguish. I cannot number the birds that I have saved during the long and severe winters of that climate; or the hares and rabbits that I have defended from the attacks of our dogs, or have nursed when accidentally wounded. (183)

With few people to love, Mathilda looked to the natural world for affection locating what she could in the animals, trees and plants. Her nurse left when she was seven. Mathilda cannot remember the cause of her departure—“if indeed I ever knew it” (183)—but when she returned to England, “the bitter tears she shed at parting were the last I saw flow for love of me for many years” (183). With no friends, she “became reconciled to solitude” (183). She saw more of her aunt “but she was in every way an unsocial being” (183). A neighbouring minister educated Mathilda but he remained just a schoolmaster offering no affection. Fearing that Mathilda would acquire “the Scotch accent and dialect” (183), her aunt stopped her befriending the peasant girls from the neighbouring village: “great pains was taken that my tongue should not disgrace my English origin” (183).

Mathilda introduces herself as a daughter but her childhood is bereft of daughterhood and familial love. The latter at least was problematic for her development as the only thing she could associate with was the environment; this was the source of all her pleasure. She says her “warm affections finding no return from any other human heart were forced to run waste on inanimate objects” (184). As she grew older, she also replaced “human intercourse” (184) with books from

her aunt's library, which included authors such as Shakespeare, Milton, Pope and Cowper as well as translations of works of history by Livy and Rollins (184).

When she was twelve, her aunt gave her a harp which became a companion for:

rainy days; a sweet soother of my feelings when any untoward accident ruffled them: I often addressed it as my only friend; I could pour forth to it my hopes and loves, and I fancied that its sweet accents answered me. I have now mentioned all my studies. (184-185)

Mathilda was a dreamer who imagined herself as an actor living in the worlds of Rosalind, Miranda and the Lady of Comus (185). Rosalind from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* was banished from court but disguised as a male is reunited with her wronged father in the forest of Arden while in *The Tempest* Miranda lives with her father, Prospero, the exiled Duke of Milan on a lonely island. In Milton's *Masque presented at Ludlow Castle, or Comus*, the Lady is lost in a forest and is tempted by the evil Comus before being reunited with her parents. Through these dreams, Mathilda imagines being reunited with her parents but mostly her father. She clung to the memory of her parents:

my mother I should never see, she was dead: but the idea of [my] unhappy, wandering father was the idol of my imagination. I bestowed on him all my affections; there was a miniature of him that I gazed on continually; I copied his last letter and read it again and again. (185)

She focuses all her energies on loving her father, a man who had not been in her life since she was a baby. She gazes on his miniature as if he were her lover rather than her father. She remembers the words of his last letter particularly that she was to "be his consoler, his companion in after years" (185). The miniature will be the key to recognition when she imagines disguising herself as a boy and leaving her aunt to find her father:

I imaged the moment to my mind a thousand and a thousand times, perpetually varying the circumstances. Sometimes it would be in a desert; in a populous city; at a ball; we should perhaps meet in a vessel; and his first words constantly were, "My daughter, I love thee!" What extatic moments have I passed in these dreams! How many tears I have shed; how often have I laughed aloud. (185)

Her imagination sees her reunited with her father more in the mode of lover than daughter. Therefore, the reunions are not quite like those of the Shakespeare plays. While her father will eventually use the words "My Daughter, I love you" (201), when he does she will not greet them with the joy implied here. Despite her dreams, however, Mathilda never found the courage to leave her aunt. She is the closest person in her life to a mother even though she is greatly deficient in the role. Mathilda is portrayed as a love-starved child who dreams of having a "real" family life—as much as is possible given that her mother is dead. She wants someone to love her, and her father would seem perfect for that role.

Unlike in the other texts, Mathilda provides the reader with the framework through which to read her story. She ponders at the beginning whether her "tragic history" (175) should:

die with me, but a feeling that I cannot define leads me on and I am too weak both in body and mind to resist the slightest impulse. While life was strong within me I thought indeed that there was a sacred horror in my tale that rendered it unfit for utterance, and now about to die I pollute its mystic terrors. It is as the wood of the Eumenides none but the dying may enter; and Oedipus is about to die. (175-176)

Facing death has made her more willing to tell her story that she implies is one of incest through the coupling of "unfit for utterance" and the reference to Oedipus. But there is also an element of self-indulgence showing here which makes her somewhat like her father. Before beginning her tale Mathilda establishes her innocence: "I record no crimes; my faults may easily be pardoned; for they proceeded not from evil motive but from want of judgement" (176). She believes

that most people would identify her as a victim—a view that I believe we modify as the novel progresses—who could not have avoided her “misfortune” (175). She invokes the idea of fate:

My fate has been governed by necessity, a hideous necessity. It required hands stronger than mine; stronger I do believe than any human force to break the thick, adamant chain that has bound me, once breathing nothing but joy, ever possessed by a warm love and delight in goodness,—to misery only to be ended, and now about to be ended, in death. (176)

Mathilda imagines herself as fated to suffer, to die early. This is perhaps a reminder of the earlier reference to Oedipus, who also protests that he could not avoid his fate.

Like Oedipus, Mathilda also complains about her innocent suffering.

Oedipus says:

You shrink from me because of my father and mother,  
But I know this: if I could tell their story,  
Then you would see I did not act myself  
So much as I endured the acts of others  
Was I by nature evil? Was I a sinner,  
I who repaid an injury done to me?  
If I had acted knowingly, even then  
You could not think me wrong; but I knew nothing  
All that I did I did in ignorance. (*Oedipus at Colonus* 245-253)

And later:

Of what crime am I guilty?  
I saved my own life, I killed the man who attacked me.  
I have fallen this low, but my hands are pure. (519-521)

Oedipus protests his innocence despite murdering his father and marrying his mother while Mathilda protests her innocence despite loving her father with the passion of a lover.

Mathilda and Oedipus both show a lack of judgment. In his introduction to *Three Theban Plays*, Theodore Howard Banks suggests that “To maintain that Oedipus could not possibly avoid his fate, once it had been announced by the

oracle, is to destroy his tragic dignity” (xv). He argues that if Oedipus were “merely a helpless pawn” (xv) then he would not have fitted Aristotle’s definition of a tragic hero. Aristotle’s definition of a such a hero is: “A man who is highly renowned and prosperous, but one who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment or frailty” (xv). Banks argues that Oedipus’s error in judgement was

in marrying anyone at all, considering what the oracle had said, and he has the frailty (the tragic flaw) of a quick temper, but these faults are not serious enough to warrant the horrors he has to endure . . . [as] far as Oedipus is concerned the problem of innocent suffering remains unsolved. (xv)

Mathilda does not fit Aristotle’s definition of a tragic hero but she does make what she calls errors of judgment. While Oedipus could have heeded the warning of the Oracle and not married anyone, the situation was not so clear for Mathilda, who had no Oracle to predict her future. However, she should have heeded the warning of her father and not pushed him to reveal the source of his despair.

Katherine Hill-Miller suggests that by placing Mathilda in Oedipus’s situation and retelling “the tale from the point of view of the daughter rather than the son . . . [Mary] Shelley rewrites a male cultural myth to show the impact of incest on the daughter, suggesting that the daughter’s fate is even more terrible than the son’s” (114). She examines the parallels between the two characters:

Both are unwilling participants in an incestuous situation; both unwittingly cause the death of one parent and then lose the other parent—who has become a lover—to suicide. Both leave the scene of revelation overwhelmed by a sense of guilt; both find peace as they are about to die. (114)

Unlike Banks, she argues that rather than a simple want of judgment both created the conditions for their tragedy by their “desire to know too much” (115). Like

Oedipus, Mathilda is “‘presumptuous and rash’ in her drive to know the truth of her situation” (115); both “have destroyed themselves by insisting on bringing the knowledge of incest to light” (115). Further, she suggests that both characters are “foredoomed to participate in an incestuous situation” (116):

Mathilda’s recognition of the sexuality of her father’s love is as tragic for her as Oedipus’s committing actual incest with his mother is for him. For the daughter, it would seem, the knowledge of the inclination to transgress a taboo is as treacherous as the literal transgression of that same taboo is for the son. (116)

Hill-Miller argues then that “for the daughter, the simple act of existence is tinged with guilt, while for the son, some act must be performed for the act to arise” (116); therefore Mary Shelley is showing how women’s existence is “fraught with guilt” (116).

In my reading of *Mathilda*, guilt is less emphasised than innocence. Her guilt and regret at pushing her father to reveal his secret is important but her lack of foresight is more revealing. I would argue that Mathilda is ignorant because she is innocent. It is not so much that she showed poor judgment in pushing her father to make his declaration as that her innocence kept her ignorant of the possibilities. This notion of innocence as ignorance is supported in comments made by Mathilda’s father in his suicide letter. He apologises for acquainting her “innocent heart” (207) with “the looks and language of unlawful and monstrous passion” (207).

Notions of innocence in the novel are complicated. There is a childish innocence about Diana, despite her being of marriageable age, that sees her receive Mathilda’s father’s protestation of love without understanding what he really meant (178). Similarly, in her retreat, Mathilda’s “amusements were simple and very innocent” (220). Then there is innocence as guiltlessness—the “innocent

deceit” (218) that Mathilda uses to deceive others of her intentions after her father’s death. Finally, in contrast to the self-inflicted death of suicide, her death from consumption will be “innocent” (243). She complicates the notion further when she imagines meeting her father again and looking on him with the “soft lustre of innocent love” (241). This is one of the ambivalences about her love for her father. Unless it is the love of a child for a parent, it cannot be innocent. What Mathilda is describing is like the meeting of lovers but it takes on overtones of childish innocence when she invokes the notions of magic and she weeps only gently so as not to disturb “the fairy scene” (241). This is somewhat like the end of a fairy tale in which the prince finds his princess. Mathilda tries to convince her reader that she is innocent in all that transpires with her father but the ambivalences of the text and the way she continually describes their relationship in terms conventionally used by lovers, undercut the notions of innocence that she promotes. She sees her father as completing her, making her whole. She does not see this as sexual and yet at times in the text, as will be shown later, her references to her love for him have sexual overtones. The ambivalence is partly to do with the way she sees her story as a fall. With her father’s declaration, Mathilda gains knowledge that comes to imbue her love for him with sexual overtones. Before his declaration, she was ignorant of this aspect of life. Her response to incest is learning to deal with her new knowledge as much as the incest itself.

### **FILIAL OBEDIENCE**

All three texts engage at some level in their representations of the father-daughter relationship with notions of filial obedience. Caroline Gonda argues that the issue of daughterly obedience came under intense public scrutiny in the long eighteenth century through the case of Mary Blandy accused of poisoning her

father, and executed in 1752, although she proclaimed to the last her innocence. Gonda suggests that this case shocked the people for two reasons: Blandy's social class—she was the daughter of a well-to-do attorney from Henley; and “the outraging of nature in the crime of parricide” (7). Parricide, the “betrayal of the father is equated with an offence against God the Father” (8). Blandy's case served as a reminder of a late seventeenth-century event of national significance, which also called into question issues of filial obedience:

The case of Queen Mary II, who with her husband, William of Orange, had replaced her father, James II on the throne of England in 1688, was a shocking reminder that the king as literal and metaphorical father was not safe from attack by his children. The repercussions of that attack would continue into the eighteenth century, most obviously in the unsuccessful Jacobite Risings of 1715 and 1745. (11)

*Exilius* and *The Cenci* are adamant that the father is owed filial obedience, and yet question how this obedience can be given in the light of incest. *Mathilda*, which does not so insistently set out the need for such obedience, does imply that Mathilda should have been more obedient to her father by acceding to his pleas not to push him on the subject of his woes.

### CLARINTHIA

Clarinthia's tale of domestic disarray is told in contrast to the novel's opening story of filial disobedience in which Clelia disobeys her father by carrying out a secret amour with a man already provisionally married to Jemella. Clelia's story, like Clarinthia's and Jemella's, raises questions about the responsibility of the parents, the search for a suitable marriage partner, and the possibilities for a happy marriage. While Clelia's story is a straightforward example of a daughter failing to honour her parents, Jemella's story is of a marriage in minority, of a child made marriageable by her parents before reaching



marriageable age. Clarinthia's story of attempted rape calls into question the limits of obedience. Does the father's passion release the daughter from her filial contract? Marilyn L. Williamson suggests that while Barker's work, along with that of Penelope Aubin and Elizabeth Singer Rowe, seems to endorse the need for filial obedience:

the larger patterns they represent . . . cause the reader to question parental wisdom in choosing suitable mates for their children. These fictions illustrate the waning of parental authority in the work of writers who overtly wish to sustain it. (244-245)

In *Exilius*, Barker is insistent that filial obedience should always be given, a challenging concept for twenty-first century readers who see that such obedience only condones the father's inappropriate behaviour. Caroline Gonda argues that:

Clarinthia inhabits a different world, in which incest is fully conscious and linked to paternal power; in which the father's authority and the daughter's obligations remain undiminished even by attempted rape; in which society welcomes back the incestuous father, while the abused daughter struggles to be heard and believed. (59)

As will be seen in the chapter on the father, this insistence on filial obedience is tied to the novel's Jacobite sentiments. I will argue that the father-daughter incest questions the obedience and allegiance of daughters. To whom do daughters pledge allegiance? For Jacobites, the questions of daughterly obedience are paramount. Mary, James II's daughter, gave her allegiance to her husband William of Orange who usurped her father's throne. Jacobites questioned whether the daughter still owed allegiance to her father or whether she now turned it over to her husband. *Exilius* is adamant that the obedience still belongs to the father first.

**BEATRICE**

Beatrice finds it extremely difficult to be obedient to her father in *The Cenci* yet she understands that this is what is expected of her. She talks of having tried to love her father. She has excused his actions, sought “to soften him” (1.3.116) with “love and tears” (1.3.115) and prayed to God “the father of all, / Passionate prayers” (1.3.118-119), but to no avail. Yet she is clear about his duties and obligations as well: “he is bound / To love and shelter” (1.3.105-106) his wife and children. Attention is first drawn to Beatrice’s troubled relationship with her father in her opening conversation with Orsino as she tells him of the celebration dinner her father has called to share some happy news of her brothers. She calls Cenci a hypocrite who is hiding his “inward hate” (1.2.51) with an “outward shew of love” (1.2.50) suggesting that he “would gladlier celebrate their deaths, / Which I have heard him pray for on his knees” (1.2.52-53). She exclaims: “Great God: that such a father should be mine” (1.2.54). Beatrice’s fears for her brothers are realised in the banquet scene, when her father announces that all his dreams for his two eldest sons have come true: they are dead. Beatrice calls him an “Unnatural man” (1.3.54) and, as the banquet breaks up implores the guests to help her and her family. She tells them that she has prayed for help and has sought love not persecution from her father. Cenci overrides all by declaring her a “wild girl” (1.3.132). When the paternal figure dismisses her concerns through simple labelling it becomes obvious, that in spite of the appalling circumstances, the daughter’s voice does not command the same public attention as the father. This does not stop Beatrice from trying:

Dare no one look on me?  
 None answer? Can one tyrant overbear  
 The sense of many best and wisest men?  
 Or is it that I sue not in some form

Of scrupulous law, that ye deny my suit?  
 Oh, God! That I were buried with my brothers!  
 And that the flowers of this departed spring  
 Were fading on my grave! And that my father  
 Were celebrating now one feast for all! (1.3.132-140)

No one will help. They hear her but they do nothing. Camillo and Colonna discuss her plea but agree that they cannot help because Cenci will make a dangerous enemy (1.3.141-143). Beatrice wishes she were buried with her brothers. Cenci tells her to retire and she curses him, as she will continue to do throughout the play, calling forth the ghosts of her brothers to hunt him down (1.3.152-153). Beatrice calls him a torturer and asks how she can be obedient to such a man. Cenci calls her an insane “painted viper” (1.3.165) and blames her for ruining the festivities. In Act 2, Cenci expresses anger at the “disobedient insolence” (2.1.107) he saw when Beatrice looked at him at the feast. He says she will never again seem superior or look on him with scorn in the “loathed image of thy cursed mother” (2.1.121). Like Clarintha and Mathilda, Beatrice is identified by her father as being the image of her mother but in Beatrice’s case this is a negative rather than a positive.

Beatrice’s eyes are one of her most powerful aspects—perhaps because they are such a large feature of the portrait that Percy Shelley wrote so passionately about. In the Preface to the play, Percy Shelley says “her eyes, which we are told were remarkable for their vivacity, are swollen with weeping and lustreless, but beautifully tender and serene” (73). The serenity in the eyes of the woman in the portrait are never described in the play. The closest moment for this would be the Beatrice of the final scene where she is resigned to her death. The confused notions of innocence in the play could well be a hangover from Percy Shelley’s viewing of the portrait. After all, he describes her image in the portrait

“as a most gentle and amiable being” (69) and yet his portrayal of her is “wild” (1.3.132) and railing against injustice. In the play her gaze is piercing, somewhat like those withering looks that Cenci uses on Lucretia. Beatrice’s gaze lays Orsino bare, renders her father speechless and sees Marzio deny that she is guilty of parricide. Lucretia, although not the target of her look, notes her “chill glare” (2.1.32).

Picking up from Curran’s connection of Beatrice to Medusa, Young-Ok

An considers the female power of the Medusan gaze and its relation to Beatrice:

Medusa’s petrifying gaze monstrously disrupts any narrative, bringing to a standstill the time-honoured expectation of the virtuous damsel, saintly-martyr, maternal or sisterly muse, despite all the other patriarchal apparatuses of appropriation, containment or “othering”. (53)

An suggests that Beatrice’s gaze:

allegorizes the otherness in her character, an ‘excess’ or alterity of her subjectivity, that cannot be contained by the all-pervasive symbolic order. Stubbornly refusing to be a part of the system, Beatrice makes an impossible attempt at transcending it and dreaming “elsewhere.” (54)

The way that Beatrice’s gaze unnerves so many male figures in the play suggests that she is able to see through not only them but the structure of the society she lives in. Her eyes are linked to her constant questioning of the world. She tries to step outside that world calling into question its structures by ignoring the judge’s questions in Act 5. Of course, stepping outside the system is impossible. Nevertheless, she claims the right to deny the legal imperatives of a court system than can charge her with the murder of her father, and yet totally ignore his crimes.

Cenci has always assumed that Beatrice will obey him. A great deal of the scene before his death is focused on exerting his authority. First he sends his

orders through Andrea that Beatrice is to attend him. Then he tells Lucretia to summon her. Beatrice will not come. The reader knows that this is because a plan is under way to kill Cenci yet he cannot believe that she flouts his authority. The patriarchal figures in the play are adamant about parental/paternal authority. Obedience to the father is akin to obedience to God; this is clear when Beatrice talks about praying to God “the father of all” (1.3.118). Beatrice, of course, not only refuses to be obedient to her father, in the end, she is disobedient before the court. Her murderous actions go against the kind of reverence expected for the patriarchal figure in the play as does her refusal to answer the charges of murder in Act 5. The play questions the need for filial obedience in the face of violence and violation yet it cannot resolve the issue because murder is also not the answer.

#### MATHILDA

Filial obedience is required of Mathilda in relation to her aunt. She is expected to follow and live by the rules of her aunt’s house. The notion is not invoked so strongly in her relation with the father, except at the time of his declaration of incestuous desire. Rather than obediently listening to her father’s pleas to be given time to come to terms with his emotions, she pushes him to reveal them. This is, of course, not just a lack of obedience but also part of her selfishness, her need to have things her way. William Brewer offers a different perspective on the filial obedience in this scene. He reads Mathilda’s push for an answer to her father’s unhappiness as a “generous impulse to end her father’s pain” (*The Mental Anatomies* 69). Unfortunately, he suggests, the filial love that makes her do this leads to their destruction and becomes a source of her guilt.

Upbringing, education and familial relationships have a direct impact on the way these marriageable age daughters react to having their marriage

possibilities thwarted and face the threat of incest from their biological father. The familial relationships in all of the families are flawed. Clarinthia's is polluted by her father's adultery, Beatrice's by her father's criminal and immoral activity, and Mathilda's by the selfishness and self-indulgence of both her father and her aunt.

## THE INCEST

This section of the chapter will focus on how the incest is represented.

There are a number of similarities across the texts—each of the daughters accepts blame for her father's actions. All image themselves as outcasts. All struggle to articulate their experience, and doubt they will be believed. All use similar language to describe the events. The site of the incestuous act is important for the outcome in each text. The attempted rape in *Exilius* is in the forest, a public space, which means that Clarinthia can be saved by a passer-by. The off-stage rape in *The Cenci* is in a bedroom in the Cenci home with no witnesses. The declaration of incestuous desire in *Mathilda* is made in the parkland of the family estate; however, it later invades the domestic space as Mathilda's father approaches her bedchamber. Once the incest is insistently within the domestic space the family home becomes polluted.

## CLARINTHIA

Clarinthia faces two threats of incest—the first is the possibility of being married to her half brother Valerius, the other is the attempted rape by her father. Once her mother is dead, her father listens to the urging of his mistress that Clarinthia should marry “his Bastard Son *Valerius*, which was such a Piece of Incest, that I could not shew the least Complacency, much less Obedience to the Proposal” (I:26). Her father ascribes her refusal to love for a young Roman rather than any “Principle of Virtue” (I:26). Clarinthia protests that she knows her duty

to her father and to heaven too well to have entered into any correspondence with a young man. Her father does not believe her protestations and so she is “persecuted with the Courtship of Valerius” (I: 27). Most of the negotiations about marriage to Valerius take place between Clarintha and Turpius and the more strenuously Clarintha rejects her father’s proposition, the more she fears him. He begins to treat her with “Importunities and Menaces” (I: 28), gradually becoming so angry that he vows she will never see the sun again until she accepts his demands. Trapped within the familial home there is no escape. She feels some reprieve when Valerius leaves for Rome, because she thinks that might stop her father’s urgings at least for the moment, but suddenly a new and “unheard of Calamity befell” (I: 28) her.

[C]ontrary to all Morality, and the Laws of Heaven, my wretched Father became enamoured of me, and express’d the same with as much Assurance as if it had been no way criminal; and when I urged the Illegality of this heinous Passion, and that he would cause the Vengeance of the Gods to descend on him, and render him at once miserable and infamous: To which he made Answer, That the Notion of Deities was a Chimera infused into my Fancy by my Mother, and a customary Education; and that all the World were misled into such Opinions by Priests and Potentates, whose Interest it was to engage their Inferiors into a Belief of some invisible Power, thereby to keep them in Subjection. (I: 28-29)

Clarintha asserts that this is a “heinous Passion” (I: 28), a “criminal” (I: 28) act, and that the Gods will seek vengeance but her father enters a theological discussion with her asserting that there are no deities, they are in fact created to keep the general population in “Subjection” (I: 29). He tries to turn the conversation to his advantage:

Mercy [is] one of the chief Attributes of these your Divinities? then why do you not imitate them, and have pity on your unhappy Father, or rather wretched Lover, who dies for you? (I: 29)

He continues to court her with “all the fond Actions and Grimaces of a passionate Lover” (I: 29) and she begins to wish for Valerius:

whose love (incestuous as it was) yet was more supportable than this other. Besides I concluded his Love and Courage would secure mine Honour from any Attempts of my Father’s Brutality, of which I began to be afraid, knowing him to be a Man that would stick at nothing to satisfy his Sensuality. (I: 29-30)

Clarinthia’s fear of her father grows. She believes he will not stop until he satisfies his sexual need. Her melancholy grows alongside her fear, which proves founded when three men in disguise enter through a secret door and abduct her from her bedchamber. They carry her on horseback for about an hour to the great forest where they threaten to “violate mine Honour” (I:30).

[B]ut the just Gods propitious to mine Innocence, by Means of my Cries, brought a Person of Virtue and Courage to my Rescue, which he accomplish’d by the Death of the Ravisher; the other two, who were at a Distance, perceiving what happen’d came running to assist their Master, where one of them immediately met his Fate, and was sent by the Stranger’s Sword to serve his Master in the other World, which his Companion seeing, made his Escape with all Expedition. (I: 30-31)

This scene removes the attempted rape from the domestic sphere to the wilds of the forest, which comes to represent the rapist’s unbridled desire. The ravisher also aims to conceal his identity, which once he is knocked down is revealed by the stranger, destroying Clarinthia’s relief at being saved.

The Stranger taking off the Vizards which disguis’d these Miscreants, in order to give Air, if any Life, yet remain’d, whose Faces I no sooner saw, but I knew ’em to be my wretched Father, and one of his Servants. O ye Gods! What Surprise and Confusion then seized me? Which I express’d in bitter Cries and Lamentations; in the mean time the unknown Person did all he could to restore him to Life but he expir’d with these Words, *Forgive me Clarinthia.* (I: 31)

Clarinthia’s confusion and surprise are palpable, she can do nothing but cry and lament as her father asks forgiveness as he takes his last breath. Eleanor



Wikborg suggests that Clarinthia's story "develops a rich fantasy of fear, guilt—and revenge—in relation to the father as a figure of unpredictable and implacable power" ("The Expression of the Forbidden in Romance Form" 15) and that the romance plot provides "the wish-fulfillment of instant retaliation. Moreover, in addition to the symbolic execution, Clarinthia is given satisfaction of hearing her father repent before he dies" (15). I would argue that this repentance and death come to haunt Clarinthia throughout the novel rather than bring her satisfaction. She believes her life is ruined because of her father's death.

Clarinthia tries to send her saviour away believing she is no longer fit for human society:

I was a Wretch incapable to receive Service or Succour; a Monster unfit for human Conversation; therefore desir'd him to leave me to wander in these Woods among the Wolves and other Savage Beasts, as the most fit Cohabitants for such a wretched Creature as I was made by my misfortune. (I: 31)

Although physically unharmed, Clarinthia is not the same person. Instead of a daughter with marriage prospects she is now a "Wretch," a "Monster unfit for human Conversation," who can only move among and inhabit the world of the wildest and most savage of creatures. Her saviour tries to "soften" her "fury" (I: 31), eventually persuading her to go with him. She has two misgivings—she should not be alone with a stranger and his hands were "wreking" (I: 32) with her father's blood. For "as wicked as he was he was still my Father" (I: 32), she says. Finally recognising the fall of night and the dangers of the forest she accepts help from the stranger, who covers her father's body with his own cloak and leads her away to the "Abode of a certain holy Hermit" (I: 32).

Clarinthia and her saviour (who remains unnamed at this point in the novel) ask the Anchorite to find Turpius's body. The body was gone when he

returned to the scene of the attempted rape, augmenting their “Disquiet” (I: 33).

The wounded saviour is now treated and given the Hermit’s bed although he protests that he will not sleep. He is anxious because he killed Clarinthia’s father and believes he deserves the brunt of her anger. Thus, he is “depriv’d” of all “Hopes of Happiness” (I: 34). “Death was what he courted; Despair having render’d it both his Interest and Inclination” (I: 34). Clarinthia stops him because she is:

loth to hear him profess himself my Lover, who had just depriv’d me of my Father. The Obligation I had to him in preserving mine Honour, at the Hazard of his Life, was too great to use him ill, and the unhappy Circumstances which accompanied his Obligation were such that I could not use him well. These Considerations made me take Leave of him; and as I turned to go out, I found a Picture which was fallen out of his Pocket, which I intended to restore to him next Morning; but instead of the Beauties of some fair Lady, which I expected, it prov’d to be his own Portraiture, which I have ever since preserved with great Veneration. (I: 34)

Clarinthia’s dilemma is clear—she is attracted to her father’s murderer. She and the stranger share responsibility for a crime from which they cannot be exonerated unless she tells what happened, but what is she to do? How can she make public this dark domestic tale, and who would believe her if she tried?

How can I ever declare to the Senate what detestable Crime caused my Father’s death? Or if I do, perhaps I shall not be believ’d: If I do not, I expose my self, and this noble Stranger, to the Fury of the Laws, and his Honour to everlasting Infamy. I am in a Labyrinth so intricate, that even the Line of Reason is not able to conduct me through its wild Mazes. On every Hand I see nothing but Danger and Distress, such as confound my Resolutions, and non-plus my Courage. On this side a rapid Stream of persecuting Laws, on that a Precipice of perpetual Shame; one to ingulph, the other to dash mine Honour in a thousand Pieces. (I: 35)

What people will see is the body of Turpius slain by a stranger in Clarinthia’s presence. They cannot see what Clarinthia knows, the violent genesis in kidnapping and attempted incestuous rape. Thus while the incest is a “detestable

Crime” (I: 35), she believes the “Fury of the Laws” (I: 35) will come down on her for her father’s death. She knows her word does not carry the weight of a patriarch’s. Her confusion is evident as she represents herself as being in an intricate “Labryinth” or a “wild” maze, seeing nothing but “Danger and Distress” (I: 35) as she tries to weigh up the “persecuting Laws” against “perpetual Shame” (I: 35). Clarinthia is ashamed of what has happened to her, blaming herself for both her father’s desire and his death.

She describes herself as an “Unfortunate Maid” (I: 35). The “two most excellent Ingredients towards a happy Life,” riches and noble birth (I: 35), are now of no use to her. Even her “constant Companion” of virtue “conspires against” and “betrays” (I: 35) her.

I say, even Virtue and Innocence (which enrich the Poor, comfort the Disconsolate, and lessen the Terrors of Death) are my Persecutors; for it is thro’ their Means that I am reduc’d to these Exigencies; that whether the Senate condemn or acquit me, give me Life or Death, Imprisonment or Liberty, all is Shame, Horror and Infamy. (I: 36)

No matter what the outside resolution or judgment, Clarinthia feels scarred, marked with “Shame, Horror and Infamy.” Here Clarinthia questions whether her sexual innocence and virtue are responsible for reducing her to her current state—whether they are the reason her father found her desirable. She momentarily questions her moral outlook, asking what use it is. Clarinthia’s sexual innocence is also targeted by Valerius and Asbella when they plan to marry her to Valerius against her will.

John Richetti—one of the few critics to discuss *Exilius*—suggests that Clarinthia’s story “rehearses the usual cliches of cornered innocence” (234), in which her suffering will earn her happiness at the end of it all. He says her story is:

an extravagant version of the fable of persecuted innocence which not only intensifies the evil of the opposing side but names the enemy very precisely, relates it clearly to the paradigm of virtuous and religious innocence versus evil, amoral irreligion. (233-234)

Barker's heroines, he suggests, are "relentlessly edifying" (235) and are "intended to be virtuous beacons who demonstrate the ability of virtue to survive and triumph against overwhelming odds" (235). Rather than being saved by their virtue, they are in fact saved "by the efforts of heroic males who love them purely" (237). Thus:

The heroine becomes, indeed, precisely what Shaftesbury complained love novellas made of women: a replacement for the "she-saints" banned by Protestantism, raised "to a capacity above what Nature had allowed," and treated "with a respect which in the natural way of love they themselves were the aptest to complain of." (235)

Gonda agrees, also arguing that Barker justifies the inclusion of the incest story for didactic purposes. She too reflects on the moral virtuousness of Clarinthia and how her virtuous upbringing "increases her sensitivity to the 'Shame, Horror and Infamy' of her dilemma" (53). Even so, she suggests that Clarinthia cannot "abandon her virtue" (53).

It is clear from Barker's Preface—she declares that she has heard of such "transactions" as incest in her time—that she is representing one of the "real" dangers in the world for young women. In this way, incest functions partly like the harm narratives of twentieth and twenty-first century incest stories (see Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *Telling Incest: Narratives of Dangerous Remembering From Stein to Sapphire*). Despite its differences, it offers a female response to these dangers. Such a reading is particularly pertinent to Barker's novel, when she gives the central voice in the incest story to the female character, the daughter. The father is voiceless in the sense that he does not get to speak for himself except

through conversations with others or reports from the narrator. The female voice is thus privileged. Yet, while the daughter gets to speak her incest experience, it is not a declaration to the law of the land but rather to a select few trusted friends. Clarintha recognises and understands that her voice will not be heard as a patriarch's would.

### BEATRICE

The representation of incest in *The Cenci* is much darker and more violent than in *Exilius*. Unlike Clarintha, there is no escape for Beatrice who is raped by her father in the gap between Acts 2 and 3. The rape touches to the core of her being. She is overwhelmed by feelings of pollution and struggles to articulate the rape, sometimes appearing quite lucid and other times erratic and wild.

An immediate change in the intensity of Beatrice's wildness is signalled at the opening of Act 3 when she enters staggering, speaking wildly saying she cannot see, her "eyes are full of blood" (3.1.2). She has been seen as "wild" before this time but never quite as disordered. Her hair is undone—the undone hair will become a symbol of her loss of virginity—but she does not know why or is not ready to admit why the world has changed for her: "The beautiful blue heaven is flecked with blood" (3.1.13) and the "sunshine on the floor is black" (3.1.14). She is "choked" (3.1.16). Like Clarintha she feels polluted:

There creeps  
A clinging, black, contaminating mist  
About me—'tis substantial, heavy, thick;  
I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues  
My fingers and my limbs to one another,  
And eats into my sinews, and dissolves  
My flesh to a pollution, poisoning  
The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life!  
My God! I never knew what the mad felt  
Before; for I am mad beyond all doubt! (3.1.16-25)

The physical effects on Beatrice are stronger than on Clarinthia, who was rescued before she could be raped, but their feelings of shame and isolation are almost identical. This scene is potentially problematic for anyone who has not read the Preface. The Preface clearly states that *The Cenci* is a tale of incest:

The story is, that an old man, having spent his life in debauchery and wickedness, conceived at length an implacable hatred towards his children; which showed itself towards one daughter under the form of an incestuous passion, aggravated by every circumstance of cruelty and violence. (69)

In her “Note on *The Cenci*”, Mary Shelley discusses Percy Shelley’s concerns about how to present the incest. She quotes from a letter he wrote to a friend in London:

The chief circumstance of which I have touched very delicately; for my principal doubt as to whether it would succeed, as an acting play, hangs entirely on the question as to whether any such a thing as incest in this shape, however treated, would be admitted on the stage. I think, however, it will form no objection, considering, first, that the facts are a matter of history, and secondly, the peculiar delicacy with which I have treated it. (157-158)

She notes that Percy Shelley thought “it might be remarked that, in the course of the play, he had never mentioned expressly Cenci’s worst crime” but “Everyone knew what it must be, but it was never imaged in words” (158). The closest reference in the play she says is Cenci’s quote about Beatrice having a child (4.1.141-157). I would argue that the scene—almost at the end of the play—where Beatrice talks of her father taking her in his arms and dragging her down is perhaps a closer reference (5.4.66-67). It is a dilemma though that the play conceals the very narrative that it turns upon. Yet the violence and torture are clear despite none of the major events occurring on stage. The hushed-up murder at the beginning, the death of Rocco and Cristofano, the torture of Beatrice and Bernardo, the rape of Beatrice and the murder of Cenci all occur off stage. In a

way, Percy Shelley sets himself a difficult task in not more clearly articulating the incest but at the same time one of the strengths of the play is its capturing of the difficulty of articulation in cases of rape.

This problem of articulation is central to Act 3, Scene 1. Throughout this scene Lucretia asks Beatrice what is wrong, what has her father done to her. She denies that she has a father, because she does not feel a father should behave as he had. She details her life as “wretched Beatrice” (3.1.43). She thinks about having been dragged “From hall to hall by the entangled hair” (3.1.45), or penned up “naked in damp cells” (3.1.46) and starved until she will “eat strange flesh” (3.1.48). She wants to believe that she “imagined” (3.1.50) or dreamed what occurred overnight. She clearly articulates some of the torture Cenci has subjected her to, still she cannot fully articulate what has made it worse this time. She again accuses her father of torture and asserts her own innocence:

What have I done?  
Am I not innocent? Is it my crime  
That one with white hair, and imperious brow,  
Who tortured me from my forgotten years,  
As parents only dare, should call himself  
My father, yet should be!—Oh! What am I?  
What name, what place, what memory shall be mine?  
What retrospects, outliving even despair? (3.1.69-76)

Like Clarintha she asks whether she is responsible for her father’s behaviour but does not say what he has done. What has she done that would make the man “who calls himself / My Father” (3.1.73-74) do this? She also recognises that her place in her social world is now in jeopardy: “What name, what place, what memory shall be mine?” (3.1.75). As Ginger Strand and Sarah Zimmerman argue, Beatrice:

knows that her “honor” is irreparably damaged when she was incestuously raped—“honor” is a social term. She understands that she will never be the same in the community’s eyes . . . recognizing that

she has in fact experienced a fall—a social fall—begins to plan her actions outside the laws of the social order that could only have seen her as a fallen woman. As Julie Carlson puts it, the play suggests “the radical contingency of female innocence as their honor is passed from mouth to mouth of men”. (255)

Beatrice is in a difficult position—although the incestuous rape is a private issue, it affects her social status. Part of her inability to cope is knowing that she has to present herself to the world as still virginal is so no longer. Also, she has been violated; the violence of the act has touched the very core of her being.

Beatrice says that she will go mad if she tries to speak or utter explanations. Yet, at the same time, there is a compulsion to speak her experience:

Oh blood, which art my father's blood,  
 Circling through these contaminated veins,  
 If thou, poured forth on the polluted earth,  
 Could wash away the crime, and punishment  
 By which I suffer—no, that cannot be!  
 Many might doubt there were a God above  
 Who sees and permits evil, and so die:  
 That faith no agony shall obscure in me. (3.1.95-102)

The blood circling through her veins then represents the blood and pollution she inherited from her father, but it could also stand in for sperm that she cannot “wash away” (3.1.98). The way Percy Shelley uses the notion of blood brings to mind the Germanic definition of incest as blood shame which compares to the Latin original of the word which is derived from “castum” meaning “chaste” (Arens 5).

Beatrice is silenced just as Clarintha was:

What are the words which you would have me speak?  
 I, who can feign no image in my mind  
 Of that which has transformed me: I whose thought  
 Is like a ghost shrouded and folded up  
 In its own formless horror. (3.1.107-111)

She does not even want to recall what happened. To fix the image in her mind would make it all seem even more real. She does not know what words she should



Speak and then, like Clarinthia, she says there is no one to tell: “For there is none to tell / My misery” (3.1.113-114) and “And left it, as I must, without a name” (3.1.116). Yet the signs are there for Lucretia even if Beatrice does not clearly announce the problem; for example, Beatrice’s attitude to her body has changed:

Ay, death—  
The punishment of crime. I pray thee, God,  
Let me not be bewildered while I judge.  
If I must live day after day, and keep  
These limbs, the unworthy temple of thy spirit,  
As a foul den from which what thou abhorrest  
May mock thee, unavenged—it shall not be!  
Self-murder—no, that might be no escape,  
For thy decree yawns like a Hell between  
Our will and it. (3.1.125-134)

Beatrice now sees her body as an “unworthy temple” and as a “foul den.” She has to live with the pollution. She contemplates suicide but that is not an option because that will only send her to Hell. There is no escape. Lucretia assures her that she has done no evil (3.1.121-122); Beatrice knows that in “this mortal world” (3.1.134) there “is no vindication and no law / Which can adjudge and execute the doom / Of that through which I suffer (3.1.135-137). No law will punish her father and avenge the wrong he has done her.

Beatrice is also unable to articulate her experience to Orsino when he enters. To him she says:

I have endured a wrong so great and strange,  
That neither life nor death can give me rest.  
Ask me not what it is, for there are deeds  
Which have no form, sufferings which have no tongue.  
(3.1.139-142)

Despite her being unable to fully articulate her suffering, Orsino suggests that she accuse Cenci and that the law will avenge her but again she repeats that she wishes she “could find a word that might make known / The crime of my destroyer” (3.1.154-155). She argues that the words that she can say will only

provide gossips with a story, an astonishment, a “strange horror of the accuser’s tale” (3.1.163), there will be no help to her. This is similar to Clarinthia’s point about the Senate. She acknowledges that even if she charges Cenci with the crime and tries to bring him publicly to face those charges, the outcome will probably be similar to his other crimes, which he has paid the church to hush up—“Think of the offender’s gold” (3.1.162). His gold weighs more than her words—even if they are the truth. And hers is a “strange horror”: “Baffling belief, and overpowering speech; / Scarce whispered, unimaginable, wrapt / In hideous hints—Oh, most assured redress” (3.1.163-166).

Act 3 establishes the effects of the rape on Beatrice. She is on the edge of madness: if she tries to speak she will go “mad” (3.1.86). She is overwhelmed by feelings of pollution, and seems to lurch from erratic moments to controlled behaviour. Beatrice’s struggle to articulate her experience of incest draws attention to the ineffectiveness of language. She cannot find the words in the language that she has to explain the events in such a way that her suffering can be fully comprehended. There are two issues with articulation—as in the banquet scene, the patriarchs are unlikely to listen because in challenging Cenci she is questioning one of their ranks and also, if Beatrice clearly articulates the incest she will announce her loss of virginity, thus her social ruin. It seems at times, however, that Beatrice also refrains from speaking clearly in an attempt to protect Bernardo. She and the other members of the family protect Bernardo at every turn, so much so that he is the only one not involved in the murder plot.

Understanding conceptions of innocence in the play and how they relate to Beatrice illuminate her representation. There is a clash between the notions of her being quintessentially innocent and the legal understanding of innocent as not

having committed a criminal act, in this case murder, that are played out mostly in Acts 4 and 5. Sexual innocence also features because of the rape. Her quintessential good or innocence is established early through the descriptions of others. Yet Beatrice's wildness at points, even before the rape, and her struggles against her father seem too angry for one of such intense goodness. Giacomo sees her as innocent in the face of suffering. He tells Orsino that Beatrice and Bernardo "Are dying underneath" his father's eye (2.2.46-47).

The memorable torturers of this land,  
Galeaz Visconti, Borgia, Ezzelin,  
Never inflicted on their meanest slave  
What these endure: shall they have no protection? (2.2.48-51)

Giacomo seems to be suggesting here that Beatrice is free from sin, she does nothing to deserve her father's torture but it also carries with it a hint of moral purity. Lucretia reinforces the sense of Beatrice as innocent before God. She tells Beatrice that her suffering will be relieved in death, that her suffering is the reward for "trampling down / The thorns which God has strewed upon the path / Which leads to immortality" (3.1.123-125). If she retains her innocence and commits no crime she will find her just deserts in death. Beatrice is unsure and mingles the terminology with more legalistic ideas. She prays that she will not:

be bewildered while I judge.  
If I must live day after day, and keep  
These limbs, the unworthy temple of thy spirit,  
As a foul den from which what thou abhorrest  
May mock me, unavenged—. (3.1.127-131)

Yet no matter what the possibilities before God she knows that suicide will lead to Hell and in the "mortal world / There is no vindication and no law / Which can adjudge and execute the doom / Of that through which I suffer" (3.1.134-137). What use is her innocence, her moral purity when it cannot be dealt with in the mortal world? On the whole, the play is ambivalent about this.

**MATHILDA**

Unlike Clarinthia and Beatrice, Mathilda's father's incestuous act is a declaration of incestuous desire rather than attempted rape or rape; however, a sexual threat is revealed after the declaration. I will argue that Mathilda's father's declaration brings about Mathilda's fall and makes her examine her own love for him in a new light. Her fall from innocence introduces her to knowledge and how language can be inflected with sexual desire even if a speaker/listener/writer is unaware of such levels of meaning. The effect is to draw out the sexuality latent in her language until she and the reader begin to see sexual desire hovering over hers as well. Mathilda's father's incestuous passion develops quickly after they are reunited. They had both imagined this reunion and come to idolize each other until a suitor enters and alerts Mathilda's father to his growing sexual desire.

Mathilda's thoughts of her father are innocent, that is not inflected with the sexual, when her dream of being reunited with her father comes true in Chapter 3: "I cannot describe the tumult of emotions that arose within me as I read it [the letter]" (186) but those emotions brought "tears of unmingled joy" (186). The words of his letters are "delicious" to her but to the reader there is a hint that he expects too much: "I look on her as the creature who will form the happiness of my future life: she is all that exists on earth that interests me" (186). Mathilda cries over his words and "exclaimed, 'He will love me!'" (186). She has no apprehension at meeting her father who is essentially a stranger. His letter indicates that he is selfishly looking to her to fill his life. Her attitude is not that different. She too expects her father will complete her life—again this is more the attitude towards a lover rather than father, yet it is not clear that Mathilda understands that this is the case.

Mathilda pores over every letter that precedes his arrival: “his desire of seeing me, he said, became more and more ardent, and he felt that the moment when he should first clasp me in his arms would be the happiest of his life” (186). The language is full of sexual innuendo and the passion of lovers; “clasp me in his arms” and the repetition of “ardent” is not the conventional language used to describe fathers and daughters.

The day her father arrives Mathilda becomes lost on her morning walk and is late back home. Losing her way in her familiar environment is the first sign that their reunion will be a troubled one. Finally, Mathilda finds her way back home rowing across the intervening lake to her father and her aunt:

As I came, dressed in white, covered only by my tartan *rachan*, my hair streaming on my shoulders, and shooting across with greater speed than it could be supposed I could give to my boat, my father has often told me that I looked more like a spirit than a human maid. I approached the shore, my father held the boat, I leapt lightly out, and in a moment was in his arms. (187)

She is ethereal in this description. Mathilda marks his return as the start of the time she “began to live” (187). Her world changed from dullness to the “brightest scene of joy and delight” (187). Her happiness with her father far exceeds her expectations; they are always together and the subjects of their conversations “inexhaustible” (187). Mathilda is so in need of human company that she is completely happy, a contrast to the later situation with Woodville where his company is not enough because he cannot replace her father.

The idolization grows as her father speaks to her with the “voice of affection” (187). She hangs on every word with “delight” particularly when he outlines his feelings for her during his absence. Just as she had dreamed of meeting with him, he tells her that “amidst cities and deserts her little fairy form” (187) would flit before him and: “The northern breeze as it refreshed me was

sweeter and more balmy for it seemed to carry some of your spirit along with it” (187). He often imagined that he would return and take her “to some fertile island where we should live at peace for ever” (187). This is reminiscent of Mathilda’s reference to *The Tempest*. Prospero and Miranda reside on an isolated island fertile enough to support them. When he thought of returning he became impatient and faced many fears:

I dared not think that the sun should shine and the moon rise not on your living form but on your grave. But, no, it is not so; I have my Mathilda, my consolation, and my hope. (187)

Again, she is described as his saviour: “I was all that he had to love on earth” (188). He enchants Mathilda. She portrays their reunion and the month immediately after as a time of magic, a time in which her world is full of charm and delight. It takes on an overtone of dreams—as if the magic will not last. This is a way of alerting the reader to the possibility that all will change, that enchantment and magic fade. It is an Edenic time that will be shattered by the fall. Even Mathilda’s familiar landscape takes on a new importance and joy:

My life had been before as a pleasing country rill, never destined to leave its native fields, but when its task was fulfilled quietly to be absorbed, and leave no trace. Now it seemed to me to be as a various river flowing through a fertile and lovely landscape, ever changing and ever beautiful . . . Life was then brilliant; I began to learn to hope and what brings a more bitter despair to the heart than hope destroyed? (189)

Here is the first hint of the despair that will come, the despair she forecast in the opening of the novel.

Following the death of her aunt, Mathilda comes to understand her father’s grief at the loss of her mother Diana. Her father “distracted” (189) her from her grief by comparing it with his despair—again the conversation turns to him. Two months after the death of her aunt, her father takes her to London. There she

studies with him—"My improvement was his delight" (190)—and begins to move in society. Their mutual love and admiration is growing: "The tender attachment that he bore me, and the love and veneration with which I returned it cast a charm over every moment" (190).

The story takes on a different note when a third person, a suitor, joins them. A change comes over her father; his looks, his anger make her "shiver" (191). Again, she likens herself to figures from literature:

Often, when my wandering fancy brought by its various images  
now consolation and now aggravation of grief to my heart, I have  
compared myself to Proserpine who was gaily and heedlessly  
gathering flowers on the sweet plain of Enna, when the King of  
Hell snatched her away to the abodes of death and misery. (191-  
192)

Now her life has turned from joy to one of "tears." She does not know what to do and expresses her uncertainty and despair through a quote from Fletcher's *The Captain* (1612):

—from what should I do here,  
Like a decaying flower, still withering  
Under his bitter words, whose kindly heat  
Should give my poor heart life? (192)

In Fletcher's play, the daughter tries to seduce her father when she mistakes him for the soldier she loves. Mathilda struggles to find the courage to ask her father for an explanation for the change in him, but only upsets him more:

There are many incidents that I might relate which shewed the  
diseased yet incomprehensible state of his mind; but I will mention  
one that occurred while we were in company with several other  
persons. On this occasion I chanced to say that I thought Myrrha  
the best of Alfieri's tragedies; as I said this I chanced to cast my  
eyes on my father and met his: for the first time the expression of  
those beloved eyes displeased me, and I saw with affright that his  
whole frame shook with some concealed emotion that in spite of  
his efforts half conquered him: as this tempest faded from his soul  
he became melancholy and silent. (192-193)

Mentioning the play *Myrrha* builds on previous references to incest from *Oedipus* and *The Captain*. Her comment most likely shook her father because he understood the story of *Myrrha* to represent the daughter's love for her father whereas she at this time is still ignorant and is therefore talking about the aesthetics of the play. Of course, in the retelling, this innocence is imbued with knowledge. In Alfieri's play, which Mary Shelley began translating in 1818 (see Frederick L. Jones, ed, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2: 39), *Myrrha* fell in love with her father Cinyras. He pushes her until she reveals the cause of her anguish but is so enraged by her declaration that he kills her with his sword. It is telling that Mary Shelley chooses Alfieri's version of the story rather than the original in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid's version, the daughter seduces the father and falls pregnant by him whereas in Alfieri's story the daughter kills herself after revealing her love to her father. In some respects, *Mathilda* is a reworking of this tale, with the father revealing his love and then taking his own life. There is one major difference: *Mathilda* returns her father's love whereas Cinyras is horrified and repelled by *Myrrha*'s love. The intensity of the desire, however, is an important similarity in the representations of the father and daughter incest in the works of Mary Shelley and Alfieri. The absence of physical intimacy intensifies the desire. Of course, in the Ovidian version *Myrrha* "consents to a quenching of her fires" (Himes 117). In Alfieri's version, *Myrrha* does not seek to quench her desire but is also unable to:

name her desire nor its object for most of the play, and when she finally does, it costs her life to voice her craving. *Myrrha*'s naming the object of her desire is her final confession. Her confessor is her father/beloved, who forces the confession from her by threatening to withhold from *Myrrha* his adoration for her. After *Myrrha* tells Cinyras finally that he is the one she wants . . . she stabs herself with his dagger. (Himes 117-118)



The mention of the play also foreshadows Mathilda's father's declaration of love and the fact that Mathilda will call for that confession. Again Mary Shelley is subverting the order—in Alfieri's play it is Cinyras that pushes for the confession. Mathilda describes her anguish as she watches the changes in her father. Because he possessed her "whole heart" (193) she "endeavoured, as a rainbow gleams upon a cataract, to soften thy tremendous sorrows" (193). She says: "In one sentence I have passed from the idea of unspeakable happiness to that of unspeakable grief but they were thus closely linked together" (193).

Mathilda and her father had been in London for five months, "three of joy, two of sorrow" (193) when he decides to leave for the family home in Yorkshire with Mathilda to follow later. She is surprised at this; this is where he grew up and where he lived with her mother. Upon arrival, Mathilda dwells on how the place is unchanged since Diana's death. Even a book is still open on the table where she left it. Her father now places her in the position of his dead wife, her mother, by asking her to read Dante where Diana had let off. Just before she starts reading, he changes his mind about the Dante, so she chooses Spenser. During their two months at the house, her father remains "cold and constrained" (195) but his eyes "expressed a living sadness. There was something in those dark deep orbs so liquid, and intense that even in happiness I could never meet their full gaze that mine did not overflow" (196-197). This description of Mathilda's father's eyes is somewhat like Percy Shelley's rendering of the eyes in the portrait of Beatrice Cenci. Mathilda wants to soothe him but does not know how. She contemplates the cause of his anguish. She "wearies" (196) herself trying to imagine the "cause of his sorrow" (196):

The solution that seemed to me the most probable was that during his residence in London he had fallen in love with some unworthy

person, and that his passion mastered him although he would not gratify it: he loved me too well to sacrifice me to this inclination, and that he had now visited this house that by reviving the memory of my mother whom he so passionately adored he might weaken the present impression. This was possible; but it was a mere conjecture unfounded on any fact. Could there be guilt in it? He was too upright and noble to *do* aught that his conscience would not approve; I did not yet know of the crime there may be in involuntary feeling and therefore ascribed his tumultuous starts and gloomy looks wholly to the struggles of his mind and not any as they were partly due to the worst fiend of all—Remorse. (196-197)

She imagines a scenario involving guilty desire and is not far from the truth—he has fallen in love not with an “unworthy” person but his daughter. Casting the daughter as lover is socially unacceptable. Mathilda is also right in her conjecture, as he will admit later, that he took her to Diana’s home in the hope that his old feelings would be revived and drive his new ones away. She admits to not yet knowing that what he felt was “involuntary” and therefore remorse. This will later apply to Mathilda.

Mathilda believes in the retelling of the story that her father would have triumphed over his feelings had she not been “foolish and presumptuous” (197) and “hurried him on until there was no recall, no hope” (197). She sets out to lighten his struggles through winning his secret from him. It is now a year since her father returned. She invites him on a walk with her, taking him to a “mossy hillock” (198) where they could talk, a place where they could commune in nature. She takes him into the Garden of Eden and there tempts him to tell her his woes. She begs him to tell her his secret, saying she cannot endure the agony any longer. She calls him her “dearest friend” (199), asking if the “happy days of mutual love” (199) are over. She wants to soothe his despair. He tells her that she is “presumptuous and very rash” (199) and if she is patient, despair will pass away but she demands to know if she is the cause of his unhappiness:

Do you not see my tears which I in vain strive against—You hear unmoved my voice broken by sobs—Feel how my hand trembles: my whole heart is in the words I speak and you must not endeavour to silence me by mere words barren of meaning: the agony of my doubt hurries me on, and you must reply. I beseech you; by your former love for me now lost, I adjure you to answer that one question. Am I the cause of your grief? (200)

She demands that he notice her tears, her sobs, her trembling hands, she badgers him to reveal the cause of his grief. Soon he cannot resist any more and tells her that she is the “sole,” “agonizing cause” (200) of his suffering. Mathilda’s father knows that speaking out is not always good and useful. The daughters in these three texts all struggle to articulate their experience of incest, yet here is a clear example of how speaking out can be detrimental and destructive. Finally he tells her to be silent, to beware and not to urge him towards her destruction—he is getting closer to giving into temptation. Nevertheless, she insists that telling her will bring “peace, not death” (200) and that their “mutual love” (200) will give them “wings to pass it” (200). She begs him to speak so that they “shall love each other as before, and forever” (200).

He is angry telling her he is “quite mad” (200) and that if he utters his “strange words” (200) they will be lost forever: “I tell you I am on the very verge of insanity; why, cruel girl, do you drive me on: you will repent and I shall die” (200). However, she refuses to let go, believing he no longer loves her, that in fact he hates her. Finally, he answers with violence:

“Yes, yes, I hate you! You are my bane, my poison, my disgust! Oh! No!” And then his manner changed, and fixing his eyes on me with an expression that convulsed every nerve and member of my frame—“you are none of all these; you are my light, my only one, my life.—My daughter, I love you!” The last words died away in a hoarse whisper, but I heard them and sunk on the ground, covering my face and almost dead with excess of sickness and fear: a cold perspiration covered my forehead and I shivered in every limb. (201)

There is an extreme contradiction in her father's emotions, she is both his poison and his great love. When her wish comes true—for "My daughter, I love you!" are the very words she earlier longed for him to say— and he divulges his secret, the answer does not bring a fairytale ending that she hoped. He cannot believe they are both alive and have not been swallowed up into a chasm, after such words have been uttered. He describes her beauty while calling himself a "Monster," "changed in mien as the fallen archangel" and a "devil" (201). He thought his declaration would "blast her to death" (201) but there she is "my Mathilda before me whom I love as one was never before loved" (201).

Having made his declaration he believes they have "leapt the chasm" (202) but that he is dying:

" . . . Oh! Beloved One, I am borne away; I can no longer sustain myself; surely this is death that is coming. Let me lay my head near your heart; let me die in your arms!"—He sunk to the earth fainting, while I, nearly as lifeless, gazed on him in despair. (202)

He faints, she tears at her hair, raves, "at one moment in pity for his sufferings I would have clasped my father in my arms; and then starting back with horror I spurned him with my foot" (202). She is in a frenzy, not knowing which way to turn, feeling as if she has been "stung by a serpent" or "scourged by a whip of scorpions" (202). Margaret Davenport Garrett says, "Mathilda's cry against the scorpion's sting respects the image of the scorpion ringed with fire which Percy Shelley uses to capture the hopeless despair of Beatrice in *The Cenci*" (55).

Giacomo in *The Cenci* tells Orsino that Count Cenci's children are left "as scorpions ringed with fire" (2.2.70) when the Pope refuses to read their petition. "What should we do but strike ourselves to death" he asks (2.2.70). Mathilda, on the other hand, does not feel trapped but rather pushed further into her frenzy, not unlike the wild madness displayed by Beatrice. Both pull at their hair and rave.

Then thinking this may be the last time she talks to her father Mathilda's soul is "melted" (202) to tenderness and love. She weeps for his "unnatural suffering—the tears that gushed in a warm and healing stream from my eyes relieved the burthen that oppressed my heart almost to madness" (202). The tears, however, will only be a short-term remedy. She weeps until he revives then she runs to her room, sending the servants out to find him.

Her father's declaration of his incestuous passion and love sends Mathilda into a spiral of despair. She wanted their relationship restored to what it was before the suitor first joined them in London; she was not ready to think that her father had fallen in love with her. She is confused because, on the one hand, she is horrified by his declaration and on the other, as will become clearer in the examination of her response to incest, it is what she wants. In her chamber she weeps, her frenzy has disappeared, instead:

as Boccaccio describes the intense and quiet grief [of] Ghismunda over the heart of Guiscardo, I sat with my hands folded, silently letting fall a perpetual stream from my eyes. Such was the depth of my emotion that I had no feeling of what caused my distress, my thoughts even wandered to many indifferent objects; but still neither moving limb or feature my tears fell until, as if the fountains were exhausted, they gradually subsided, and I awoke to life as from a dream. (203)

She alludes to Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* in which Ghismonda weeps over a golden cup containing the heart of her lover, Guiscardo, whom her father has slain. Again, Mathilda uses an example of lovers rather than father and daughter to describe her feelings. In some ways, her father has slain her lover. He sent her suitor away and having declared his love stripped her of the chance to love anyone but him. This is because in time she will recognise that she returns his love. And following the fall their relationship is imbued with the sexual, something she did not understand before her father's declaration.

In “From *The Fields of Fancy* to *Matilda*: Mary Shelley’s Changing Conception of her Novella,” Pamela Clemit points out that as well as the reference to Ghismonda and Guiscardo, Mathilda uses other examples of lovers to describe her relationship with her father. She also “identifies herself in turn with Psyche, temporarily abandoned by her lover Cupid” and “Proserpine, carried off to wed Pluto, the King of Hades” (161).

Mathilda thinks about her future, declaring she must never see or speak to her father again. She contemplates becoming a nun so that she might be shut away from the world and live in solitude in a world in which she will repress her sexuality. This is similar to Clarintha’s wish after the death of her father. Then Mathilda thinks of being reunited with her father, wondering whether it is possible for her father to overcome his love and passion. She recognises that he is a virile man, with a sexual appetite. She wishes for the day when “youth” (204) will be dead within him:

Let thy hairs be as snow; thy walk trembling and thy voice have lost its mellow tones! Let the liquid lustre of thine eyes be quenched; and then return to me, return to thy Mathilda, thy child, who may then be clasped in thy loved arms, while thy heart beats with sinless emotion. Go, Devoted One, and return thus!—This is my curse, a daughter’s curse: go, and return pure to thy child, who will never love aught but thee. (204)

She wants to be clasped in his arms without the threat of the sexual, she wants “sinless emotion” and hopes that this may be possible when he is old. She suggests that with age purity can enter their relationship because it can be non-sexual. She acknowledges that she cannot love anyone else because she loves her father alone.

As she calms, she starts to write a letter to her father but someone at her door disturbs her tranquility. There is no knock and the door does not open, the

steps recede but the moment brings intense fear. She refuses to “dare express the emotions” (205) she felt. She believes it was her father and feels the sexual threat:

I felt almost ready to faint while he had stood there, but I had not betrayed my wakefulness by the slightest motion, although I had heard my own heart beat with violent fear. He had withdrawn. Oh, never, never, may I see him again! (205)

Although he does not knock or enter her chamber, Mathilda now fears his love.

Clemit describes this as the most “irresolvably ambiguous moment in the narrative” (157) with Mary Shelley adopting the conventions of “gothic suspense narrative to convey the conflict between the heroine’s fear that her father is about to enter her room and her desire for him to do so” (158). She suggests that the reader’s attention is drawn to this passage because unlike Mathilda’s usual emotive language, this prose is an understated moment, as if to register “the hidden psychological impulses of a flawed narrator who is unaware of the full implications of what she is saying” (158).

Although Mathilda’s reaction to the declaration is detailed further as she exiles herself in a response to the incest, it is clear that her reaction is similar to that of Clarintha and Beatrice. Their linguistic representation of the incest is strikingly similar, with notions of pollution and monstrosity filling their articulations. Despite the apparent differences—daughter of marriageable age versus child—this is where the stories of the eighteenth century come closest in representation to those of the late twentieth century. The impact on the daughters is registered as similar despite differences in social situation and outcomes. I have made the distinction between twentieth and twenty-first century incest and child sexual abuse texts and those of the long eighteenth century because to interpret the latter simply as one would the contemporary texts is to miss their historical context and their uniqueness. As Karen Jacobsen McLennan argues, however,

“Generations of women without knowledge or access to their literary ancestors gave familiar and repeated voices to the incestuous experience and its consequences . . . the authors reveal the recurrent incest themes of self-blame, social condemnation, and cultural exile” (1). Of course, one of the authors featured in this thesis is male; however, his play is more supportive of the daughter than the father, thus is close to the way women writers render incest.

It is clear from the three texts of this thesis, that when the incest is most insistently sited within the domestic sphere, it will bring destruction to the family. The inner space of the family, as Boose points out in the case of incest, is polluted as is the daughter. Clarinthia’s family can be reunited and all forgiven because the attempted rape did not infect the familial space. The attack was in a public arena, which meant that the incest could be averted and Clarinthia saved. The rape of Beatrice brings instant pollution to Beatrice and to the family. The familial space in *Mathilda* is also polluted by the father’s approach to Mathilda’s bedroom even though there has been no physical violation as in *The Cenci*. *Mathilda* is confused by the daughter’s returning her father’s love, which will be examined more closely in the next section focussed on how the daughters respond to incest.

## **RESPONDING TO INCEST**

The final section of this chapter explores the interpretive crux of each text as the daughters use various strategies in response to incest. Clarinthia and Mathilda both contemplate a life in exile but only Mathilda finally chooses and institutes exile. Mathilda, like Beatrice, also considers suicide. Beatrice’s religious belief rejects this as an option while Woodville talks Mathilda out of taking such drastic action. Beatrice also seeks relief from the future possibilities of rape and revenge for the rape and torture already inflicted by becoming involved in her



father's murder. For the modern reader, Clarinthia's sudden forgiveness of her father is jarring; whereas Beatrice's and Mathilda's responses to their fathers are full of contradiction. At times, Mathilda seems to return her father's love and passion and at others she wants a sexless union. Regardless of which she would prefer, she feels outcast from the social world just as Clarinthia and Beatrice do.

### CLARINTHIA

A series of adventures besets Clarinthia as she struggles to deal with the attempted rape and with her love for her rescuer who is also, she believes, her father's murderer. The morning after the attempted rape, she leaves the Anchorite's home to gather herbs to heal the stranger's wounds only to be whisked away by another posse of marauding armed men, this time servants of her brother Valerius, who has the audacity to mask his own incestuous desire in sanctimonious rhetoric. He reproaches Clarinthia:

with much Bitterness, as being a Shame to my Sex, and a Dishonour to my noble Race for running away, and abiding in secret with a Stranger, and not only so, but impious beyond parallel, in causing my Father's Death, rather than return to him and my Obedience, when he endeavoured to take me out of the Hands of this wicked Co-partner. (I: 36-37)

Valerius pays no attention to his sister's attempts to set the story straight, and tells her, "if he had not had a Passion for me, that carried him beyond the usual Pitch of Lovers" (I: 37), he would hand her to the authorities to face charges of murdering her father, and arrange for her estate to be confiscated and turned over to him. Only "the perfect Love I have for your Person" (I: 38) constrains him. As a mark of his devotion, he decides to send her to his mother's castle in Sicily. Clarinthia recognises this seeming care and protection as in reality another threat of sexual entrapment:

This was a hard Stroke of Fortune; to be obliged to, and under the Dominion of, that Woman, whose lewd Life with my Father had made me to detest, and withall to be in the Power of *Valerius*, whose Love I dreaded more than the Danger of the Laws, or the Anger of the Senate. (I: 38)

The fear she felt for her father is now transferred to her brother. In fact, she fears him more than facing the “Anger” (I:38) she expects from the Senate if she has to face them to tell her story. Clarintha is distressed by the incestuous nature of Valerius’s desire:

otherwise his Addresses were honourable, and his Person agreeable; nor wanted he Reasons to alledge, nor Examples to produce, that might justify the legality of his Pretensions; as indeed there are but too many Examples of that kind amongst the Gods and Heroes. Even the present King and Queen of *Egypt* live in that State which our Laws call Incest. (I: 41)

In the beginning, Clarintha sees a differentiation in the power wielded by Turpius and Valerius but just as she feared Turpius in the lead-up to the attempted rape, so she will come to fear Valerius. Once their father is dead, Valerius as brother assumes his role, and in loco parentis takes charge of the daughter of marriageable age. This is why he can order her to Sicily, a site of sexual contamination in her mind because it is the home of her father’s mistress, Asbella. The evil mistress, who aspires to be Clarintha’s stepmother, is the genesis of the desire gone wrong—the father desired Asbella, Valerius was the product of that adulterous union and eventually desires his sister.

As Valerius steps more into the gap vacated by his father, he too accuses Clarintha of having given herself as well as her affections to the stranger, an accusation that shocks and angers her. Her anger is such that she causes Valerius to weep and fall “into a Melancholy, which impair’d his Health” (I: 42) although not for long. All the time that Clarintha is captive, Asbella tries to convince Valerius to force her into marriage arguing that Clarintha does not accept

Valerius as her brother, lover or benefactor even though he is protecting her despite her crimes. Clarintha is able to escape before Valerius can force her into marriage.

She escapes in an old boat and is eventually found by a passing ship commanded by her noble stranger and saviour (known at this point in the novel as Lysander) who declares his love to her. Her happiness is again shortlived. A storm wrecks the ship and she ends up on the coast of Africa where, after concealing her identity, she becomes a servant. There she meets Ismenus who Clarintha asks to continue her story. Clarintha's voice is replaced with a male voice that stresses the "Love and Esteem" (I: 55) Clarintha evokes in everyone she meets, although he promises not to dwell too much on her character in case it embarrasses her. Ismenus tells of Clarintha's plan to live out her day in secret in Africa and her resolution of "perpetual Virginity" (I: 56). Her aim is to live as if her body were sexless. She finds herself gaining the ire of another man, this time Hannibal, as he tries to court her and she resists his attempts. It becomes clear that she and Ismenus will have to escape Africa. Ismenus enlists the help of Exilius to save Clarintha from her sentence of death by fire. Clarintha now vows to become a "Vestal Nun, if, by the Favour of the Gods, she arrived safe into her own Country" (I: 72), which she does. At the end of Ismenus's tale, Marcellus comments that the "Beauty of *Clarintha*, ought not to be hid in those obscure Cells, but placed in such a Sphere, where they may irradiate and enliven the Hearts of all admiring Beholders" (I: 73). Clarintha replies:

Had my *Lysander* liv'd, I should have thought on no such Retreat;  
but since his Death, I ought to count those Beauties which I am  
complemented, but as Comets, whose Aspects are horrible, and  
their Influence destructive to my Quiet; wherefore it behoves me to  
endeavour their Fall and Dissolution: for besides the Death of the  
incomparable *Lysander*, my other Misfortunes render me unfit for

human Society, so ought to be lopp'd off as an useless and  
cumbersom member of the body Politick, and since Death's kind  
Hand refuses me that Favour, my self shall do it, by a voluntary  
dying Life amongst those sacred Recluses. (I: 73-74)

Lysander's death makes her want to retreat but her other "Misfortunes" (I: 74), the attempted rape, make her "unfit for human Society" (I: 74). Marcellus promises to "fortify" (I: 74) her interest with the senate and take her to Lord Publius Scipio's house, which is nearby.

Clarinthia's tale, then, has been punctuated with notions of misfortune and to this point she has been involved in a series of dramatic incidents. She is portrayed through her own words and those of others as virtuous, innocent and trusting. To the modern reader she seems to suffer as many incest victims do, feeling shame and horror, and she accepts the blame for her father's desire for her. Her guilt is increased by the thought that she has brought about her father's death. She is anxious because she does not think that anyone, but particularly in her case the members of the Senate, the law of the country, will believe her story. Although she is telling her story, she is not sure that she can put into words her experience before the legal body dominated by male elders. The only time she tries persuasion, trying to explain the situation to Valerius, he refuses to listen.

Clarinthia's future possibilities change again when she is reunited with Asiaticus at the house of Publius Scipio. The spectre of incest still remains with events unresolved because she believes Turpius to be dead. As will be seen in the chapter on the father, when he turns up alive all is forgiven in a "Shower of Tears" (II: 105). Gonda argues that:

the fact that he is reduced to asking for pity and pardon from his daughter is itself a measure of the magnitude of his transgression. But the "Welcome and kind Addresses" with which he is accepted by his peers, who know nothing of him but his offences, are

extremely unsettling. So, too, is Clarinthia's kneeling submission to her "extremely chang'd" father. (53)

Gonda argues that it is unsatisfactory that despite his actions Turpius is able to recover his reputation with little effort yet "Clarinthia retains hers only by the strictest adherence to the rules of feminine and filial conduct. The daughter must continue to follow the 'difficult Paths' marked out for her by society, even in the fact of attempted rape by her father" (53-54). I will examine this moment more closely in the chapter on the father agreeing that this resolution is awkward for the contemporary reader, who is unpersuaded by its psychology but arguing that if read through the father, the incest posits a Jacobite argument in which forgiveness plays an essential role in a larger political scenario.

### BEATRICE

As already seen, Beatrice briefly considers suicide in the wake of the rape but decides that this would send her to "Hell" (3.1.133). Yet she knows her only escape is her death or Cenci's. It is Beatrice's need to ensure that the rape does not reoccur—she says to Orsino "Advise me how it shall not be again" (3.1.147)—as well as a desire for revenge that sees her become involved in a plot to murder her father. This move takes her from the position of victim to actor; within the confines of the domestic environment, Beatrice, Lucretia and Giacomo fight back. The murder is about redressing the balance of power and in effect, ensures a future for Bernardo. Orsino is the first to articulate the idea of murder and knows two outlaws who can help them. The first plot is to kill Cenci on the way to the Castle of Petrella but he survives. Orsino then offers further suggestions with the discussion of murder heightening through a conversation between Olimpio, Marzio, Lucretia and Beatrice in Act 4, Scene 2. Olimpio and Marzio then carry out the murder in Act 4, Scene 3. At first, they feel unable to

kill Cenci—while sleeping he looks “innocent” (4.3.12), like an “old and sleeping man” (4.3.9) with a “reverent brow” (4.3.10). Beatrice calls them “Cowards and traitors” (4.3.26) and says she will do it herself if she must (4.3.32) but Olimpio and Marzio make another attempt (4.3.34-35). Once he is dead Beatrice just wants to sleep and is relieved that she can now do so “Fearless and calm” (4.3.65).

Beatrice’s peace is soon shattered as Legate Savella arrives with a warrant for Cenci’s arrest—an irony given that the family has been driven to murder just before the authorities step in. Savella believes Cenci was murdered and organises a search of the castle, which sees Olimpio killed and Marzio captured. Savella arrests Beatrice and Lucretia and takes them back to Rome. Beatrice denies having a role in the murder when Savella confronts her at the Castle. She tells him she is “more innocent of parricide” than a fatherless child (4.4.112-113), and complains of human laws that “Bar all access to retribution” (4.4.118) but blame the victims when “heaven doth interpose to do / What ye neglected” (4.4.119-120). She calls Marzio a “poor wretch” (4.4.122) and asks how she can be accused of murder if the sword was in his hand. All, she says, was justice from God for a crime “which mortal tongue[s] dare never name” (4.4.128)—incest.

Savella asks whether she wanted Cenci dead and she admits that she prayed for it. He prefers not to judge but she accuses him of doing exactly that. Again, Beatrice denies she is guilty of parricide. She begs Savella to leave them to their suffering and not “stain” their noble house (4.4.150) but he says they must answer to the Pope. Although Lucretia protests against going to Rome, Beatrice agrees:

There, as here,  
Our innocence is an armed heel  
To trample accusation. God is there,  
As here, and with his shadow ever clothes

The innocent, the injured and the weak;  
And such are we. (4.4.158-163)

She seems to be saying that their innocence will arm them against all accusation and with the protection of God they can face that in Rome as anywhere. Beatrice mingles notions of judging in the mortal world with God's judgment. Having suffered as she has, she believes herself innocent in God's eyes. She will not answer to the mortal crime because the crime Cenci committed—the rape—cannot be named and accounted for. The reader knows of Beatrice's role in the murder, her denial demands the reader reassess all she has said before. Innocence is operating in different ways here. In evoking a comparison between human laws and God's laws, Beatrice invokes the idea of innocence as free of guilt. This seems to go with Giacomo's earlier comment about her innocence.

Stuart M. Sperry, in "The Ethical Politics of Shelley's *The Cenci*," argues that Savella's arrival is the crux and the "most obvious and dramatic piece of irony in the play" (416). He says that for some older commentators the irony underlines "Beatrice's error in adopting violent means to do away with her father by showing that, had she only waited, the course of justice would have been taken out of her hands" (416). For others, he explains, picking up particularly arguments from Stuart Curran:

Savella's arrival is the culminating absurdity in a cruel and illogical world where the only course open to Beatrice is to seek to impose a moral order of her own and where she is punished for bringing about the very end that society itself has at last belatedly ordained. (416)

He says the two analyses "are closely similar in their perception of the irony but diametrically opposed in the conclusions they draw from it" (416). There is another option: that is to see Percy Shelley as critiquing the worst kind of patriarchal world that does not adequately cater for anyone but the patriarch. This

helps to make sense of Beatrice's discussion of the unnameable crime and the limits of human laws. Her comment on Savella's judgement is the first sign of her knowledge that in the place of her father will step other patriarchal figures. She did not see that the death of her father would not set her free, but instead place her in the hands of other patriarchs who see their role as maintaining that patriarchal order. Beatrice's crime—beyond the moral issues—threatens the patriarchal world in which she lives—a corrupt patriarchal world centred on self-satisfaction above the protection and future of society.

Sperry sees the moral problem of the play in Beatrice's choice to commit murder. He asks, were her actions justified or was she wrong in her choice? He draws attention to Percy Shelley's Preface, which says:

Undoubtedly, no person can be truly dishonored by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character: . . . (71)

Despite Percy Shelley's implication here that rape does not dishonour women ("no person can be truly dishonored by the act of another"), and that revenge is therefore a "pernicious" response by the woman—a logic difficult to accept—the play in fact does not entirely support his position. Instead the play requests sympathy for Beatrice because of what Cenci did as well as the fact that the gravity of his actions was not recognised.

Sperry suggests this passage "underlines the terms of an inflexible moral imperative, one Beatrice violates in carrying out the murder of her father" (413). He suggests that Beatrice has no way of "defending" herself against Cenci's physical and psychological violation, which drives her "to the point of madness"



(414). “Isolated by the political corruption of the society, church and state that surrounds her, Beatrice seems to have no other course than to adopt the violent means of her persecutors” (414). She has no escape—there is no escape inside the family and no one on the outside she can call in for assistance.

Sperry suggests that the “moral problematics of her situation” (414) as much as Reni’s portrait inspired Percy Shelley to write the play:

The “Preface” sets forth an ideal of human forbearance; yet as the play proceeds and forces us not simply to observe but both sympathize and judge, we ask ourselves, is there no limit to what Beatrice must endure? (414)

To match violence with violence is unacceptable but what other course of action does Beatrice have in a world where she simply cannot escape her father? As Percy Shelley points out in the Preface this is partly what makes her a tragic figure. This question troubles and is the point of disagreement for critics. Yet, the play offers Beatrice few alternatives. The main one, to marry, is removed as a choice by her father, the very figure who should put her forward for marriage. She is betrayed by her other hope, Orsino, who does not give the petition to the Pope as he promises but rather returns it unrepresented and then guides her in the direction of murder all, as will be shown in the section on the suitor, for his own ends.

In Act 5, the term “innocent” becomes more completely entwined with legalistic notions. The first judge asks Marzio if he will persist in his denial: “I ask you, are you innocent, or guilty?” (5.2.2). The denials continue until the judges promise to put him on the rack. Then he confesses that Giacomo and Orsino sent him to Beatrice and Lucretia and that he and Olimpio strangled Cenci in his sleep. Lucretia, Beatrice and Giacomo are brought in and asked when they last saw Marzio. Beatrice says that she has never seen him. Marzio accuses her of urging

him to kill her father. Beatrice advances towards him; he covers his face and shrinks back, saying:

Oh, dart  
The terrible resentment of those eyes  
On the dead earth! Turn them away from me!  
They wound: 'twas torture forced the truth. My Lords,  
Having said this, let me be led to death. (5.2.29-33)

Her gaze makes him retract the statement that he made while being tortured.

Marzio reads the “resentment” in her eyes. Beatrice resents having to answer for an act that she does not believe was a crime. Living with Cenci had become unbearable. His death was the only way out. No one outside the family could or would help her. The harmed individual that she is portrayed as here can no longer objectively judge her situation. Beatrice asks Camillo to vouch for her innocence. Camillo’s response is to pledge his “soul / That she is guiltless” (5.2.61-62) and that “She is pure as speechless infancy!” (5.2.69). The judge reaffirms that the Pope wants the “monstrous crime” (5.2.72) punished. The evidence justifies it. Beatrice challenges him over Marzio’s evidence. She asks Marzio why he has chosen to “kill the innocent” (5.2.80). Marzio finally says he cannot speak any more: “It was horrid torture forced the truth” (5.2.89). Beatrice making a legal argument asks why she would have left behind such evidence if she had planned Cenci’s murder. Camillo wants Marzio led by Beatrice again, he observes that he “shrinks from her regard like autumn’s leaf / From the keen breath of the serenest north” (5.2.113-114). Beatrice confuses the issue of innocence even more when she again addresses Marzio asking what evil she has done him (5.2.118). She tells him she has only lived “a few sad years” (5.2.119) and her father has poisoned “youth’s sweet hope” (5.2.122) and “Stabbed with one blow my everlasting soul”

(5.2.123). She was raped, stabbed with the penis, a physical act that had the power to destroy her hope and innocence and “peace.” While her:

wound was not mortal; so my hate  
 Became the only worship I could lift  
 To our great father, who in pity and love,  
 Armed thee, as thou dost say, to cut him off;  
 And thus his wrong becomes my accusation;  
 And art thou the accuser? If thou hopest  
 Mercy in heaven, show justice upon earth:  
 Worse than a bloody hand is a hard heart. (5.2.126-133)

Evil is not the same here as guilt. Her act unlike Cenci’s was never evil, just misguided retribution, a crime but not evil. Beatrice suggests he think about the harm he has brought to one on earth who was “most pure and innocent” (5.2.138), he should be ready to confess all to God. She has to believe Marzio was God’s answer to her situation and she wants him to show “justice upon earth” (5.2.132). She tells him that when he meets God he should say:

there was one  
 Who was most pure and innocent on earth;  
 And because she endured what never any  
 Guilty or innocent, endured before;  
 Because her wrongs could not be told, not thought;  
 Because thy hand at length did rescue her;  
 I with my words killed her and all her kin. (5.2.137-143)

She casts Marzio as her “rescuer,” sent by God to release her from her earthly or moral hell. She again stresses her purity and innocence—and the fact that not only can she not tell of what happened to her but also that she cannot admit thoughts and memories of the act into her mind. These would destroy her. She believed her only relief would come at the death of Cenci, not because equilibrium could be fully restored but because she would not have to endure the torture any longer. She asks Marzio if he wants to be responsible, when “thy hand at length did rescue her” (5.2.141), to now sentence her and her kin to death.

Again, she repeats that her only crime was to suffer (5.2.149):

Think  
 What 'tis to blot with infamy and blood  
 All that which shows like innocence, and is,  
 Hear me, great God! I swear, most innocent,  
 So that the world lose all discrimination  
 Between the sly, fierce, wild regard of guilt,  
 And that which now compels thee to reply  
 To what I ask: Am I, or am I not  
 A parricide?  
*Marzio.*            Thou art not! (5.2.149-157)

She swears before God that she is innocent and her world has lost the ability to discriminate between guilt and innocence. Marzio declares Beatrice is innocent, that she is not a “parricide” (5.2.157). The judge asks: “What is this?” and Marzio replies that those he accused are innocent, that he alone is guilty. The judge orders him to be tortured some more; Marzio replies that they can torture him all they like but he will declare Beatrice “innocent” (5.2.159). Then she too declares her innocence to God. Marzio denies she is a “parricide”: “A keener pang has wrung a higher truth / From my last breath. She is most innocent!” (5.2.164-165). Led off for more torture, he is later pronounced dead. Camillo tries to overrule any further proceedings against “these most innocent and noble persons” (5.2.187) but the judge decides the “Pope’s pleasure” must be done (5.2.189) so they will be tortured. Torture is seen as the only way to obtain truth—its use is aligned with the malicious torture described by Cenci at the beginning of the play and to be discussed in the section on the father.

In the final scenes of the play, Beatrice appears calm and at peace. In Act 5, Scene 3 in the cell, Bernardo enters to find Beatrice asleep. He wakes her, asking how she can sleep; he is surprised at her peace. Beatrice replies that she has been dreaming that they were all in paradise. “This cell seems like a kind of Paradise / After our father’s presence” (5.3.11-12). This type of statement indicates the depth of despair she felt at the hands of her father and reaffirms her

belief in her own innocence. The sleeping Beatrice is at peace, a far cry from the wildness and madness witnessed after the rape. She is no longer being polluted in the way that she was.

Notions of innocence change again when Beatrice is told that Giacomo and Lucretia have confessed. She queries what they had to confess. She talks of “white innocence” (5.3.24) wearing the “mask of guilt” (5.3.25). The innocent confess to guilt because of the torture. Cenci their torturer inside the private familial space, has been replaced by the court and its officials as torturers in the public legal space. Lucretia and Giacomo could not stand up to Cenci and they cannot stand up to these torturers either. The judge enters with Lucretia and Giacomo and Beatrice says she has nothing to confess. Lucretia urges her to tell the truth and let them all die quickly but Beatrice refuses to say she is guilty, again drawing attention to Cenci’s unnameable crime that the authorities have ignored despite her continual attempts to draw their attention to it.

*Judge.* Art thou not guilty of thy father’s death?  
*Beatrice.* Or wilt thou rather tax high-judging God  
 That he permitted such an act as that  
 Which I have suffered, and which he beheld;  
 Made it unutterable, and took from it  
 All refuge, all revenge, all consequence,  
 But that which thou hast called my father’s death?  
 Which is or is not what men call a crime,  
 What either I have done, or have not done;  
 Say what ye will. I shall deny no more.  
 If ye desire it thus, thus let it be,  
 And so an end of all. Now do your will;  
 No other pains shall force another word. (5.3.77-89)

Right to the end, she talks of her father’s “unutterable deed.” Not one character in the play—after Lucretia’s first efforts—asks her what she means. She talks and is not fully heard, thus not only emphasizing her silence but the way society has silenced her. Through this, Percy Shelley reinforces the argument in the play that

the father's word is more highly rated than that of the daughter. As Beatrice points out regardless of what she says, she will not be believed. She asks only for release: "No other pains shall force another world" (5.3.89). Just as Clarinthia talks of the father's crime that the world cannot see, Beatrice here faces the same difficulty. The father's murder is visible but sexual violation, rape, is not. However, Clarinthia accepts that she will be blamed for her father's death, Beatrice in her altered and traumatised state after the rape cannot see that murder is not the solution. Beatrice says that just because murder can be labelled, does not mean it is the worst crime committed. She refuses to answer in the end, again drawing attention to Cenci's crime that cannot be named. Giacomo laments betraying Beatrice "the one thing innocent and pure / In this black guilty world" (5.3.101-102). Beatrice comments how death is their only escape. The Judge convicts her even though she has not confessed.

After Beatrice decides to say no more, Beatrice, Giacomo and Lucretia are left alone. Giacomo and Lucretia lament all that has occurred, their confession and their "dreadful end" (4.3.107). Beatrice suggests it is weaker to lament than to confess; she says although it seems that God has abandoned them they should not think about death. She sings to them "some dull old" (5.3.124) tune as if to return to a time before the family's agonies, her brothers' deaths, and her rape, a time of innocence. In this way, she shows a childlike innocence, that all that is wrong can be swept away. The song is not as "innocent" as she suggests, talking of death, nevertheless her act of singing is childlike.

In the final scene—Act 5, Scene 4—Beatrice asks Camillo if he can arrange a pardon but nothing will change the Pope's mind. Beatrice asks how it

can be possible that she has to die so suddenly and so young. For a moment, she fears that it will lead her to her:

father's spirit,  
His eye, his voice, his touch surrounding me;  
The atmosphere and breath of my dead life!  
If sometimes, as a shape more like himself,  
Even the form which tortured me on earth,  
Masked in grey hairs and wrinkles, he should come  
And wind me in his hellish arms, and fix  
His eyes on mine, and drag me down, down, down!  
For was he not alone omnipotent  
On Earth, and ever present? even tho' dead,  
Does not his spirit live in all that breathe,  
And work for me and mine still the same ruin,  
Scorn, pain, despair? Who ever yet returned  
To teach the laws of death's untrodden realm?  
Unjust perhaps as those which drive us now,  
O, whither, whither? (5.4.60-75)

Here she gives the closest description of the rape, her father winding her into his arms and dragging her down, down. She is angry that her father can still ruin their lives even though he is dead. She sees father figures all around her as standing in his place. Cenci may be dead but then she faces a series of patriarchal figures—Savella, the judges and by implication the Pope.

Bernardo has the final say on Beatrice describing his despair at seeing “That perfect mirror of pure innocence” (5.4.130) destroyed. Beatrice talks of her innocence in terms of her faith. She did her best to live “ever holy and unstained” (5.4.149) before God, despite being “rapt in a strange cloud of crime and shame” (5.4.148). He too will have to live with a mark on his “innocent brow” (5.4.151) because of what has happened. And he was truly innocent, having nothing to do with the murder, although presumably tainted because he bears the family name. Beatrice’s protection of Bernardo has meant that there is a reinstatement of the less corrupt domesticity at the end. Beatrice’s, Giacomo’s and Lucretia’s actions provide a future for Bernardo, who now no longer is at the mercy and whim of his

torturing father. The further implication is that they were all compromised and unlikely to survive because of Cenci's evil.

Beatrice bids farewell to Camillo before asking Lucretia to tie her girdle and bind up her hair. The play finishes with the simple act that a mother and daughter often share—helping each other with their hair. Curran argues that the arrangement of Beatrice's and Lucretia's hair is "a sign that at last she is to be freed from the meaningless confusion of the world" (116). This tying of hair ends the play on a domestic note. While the setting is the prison, they can achieve a harmony not possible in their domestic home during Cenci's life. Cenci always shattered any hope of harmony. Beatrice's hair is a symbol of her virginity. It becomes wild and untied after the rape as strands break free from the bindings. By the end, although she cannot regain her virginity, Beatrice is at peace. She has found a way to deal with the violation. Once she has refused to answer to the father figures any more, she can be at peace.

When Beatrice faces the judges in Act 5, she is in fact facing two sets of judges, those in the courtroom and the reader. It is here that the reader makes their final choice about Beatrice's guilt or innocence. This is the interpretive crux—and the play is ambiguous. Although she goes on to argue that Percy Shelley makes a critique of "romantic performance" (207), Margot Harrison presents the common response to Beatrice as failing to keep the sympathies of readers and critics:

At first glance, "unspeakable" incest aside, *The Cenci* seems to serve up just the sort of Gothic/melodramatic duel which pleased early nineteenth-century spectators. But the problem with this duel as melodrama or tragedy is that its sole survivor is finally neither heroic, nor even "sympathetic." Critics agree that Beatrice Cenci turns readers and spectators against her in the fifth act, where, under arrest for the murder of her father who raped her, she undertakes to save herself by lying about her role in the crime. Not content with having "a higher truth" on her side in court, Beatrice denies the petty facts of her story as well . . . Worse still, perhaps



Beatrice fails to make the audience a party to her deceit. Unlike many a romantic anti-hero, she does not expose and deplore her own hypocrisy in soliloquy. (187-188)

Thus, when they lower the gavel they conclude the play fails because they feel alienated from Beatrice. Julie Carlson finds that it is Beatrice's acting that is the cause of the problem. "The trial scene allows her to finally appear as what and who she 'is': a commanding actress" (Harrison 188). Beatrice thus shows she is unfit for the stage by acting. But is her denial a case of acting? As already noted, Sperry discusses the divergent views on how to read this play in terms of Beatrice's denials. The response to her actions covers moral outrage to Curran's interpretation of her as an "existential heroine":

Faced with the necessity of acting within an illogical universe so corrupt as to be morally absurd, Beatrice has no recourse but to attempt to establish an existential order of her own, and there is neither justification nor point in condemning her in terms of simple ethical platitudes. (Sperry 414)

Sperry suggests that the reader is "appalled" to see her "brazenly lie to her judges" (422). In the end, Beatrice, he says, has adopted the "violence and absolutism" of Cenci's ways:

He triumphs not by despoiling her of her virginity but by corrupting her deeper integrity, by inducing her to believe that she can escape injuries that appear to her intolerably monstrous only by assuming his power and spirit, by becoming one with the very being she detests. (422)

Sperry suggests, "Beatrice's tragic flaw is her idealization of her own virginity" (420). He is aware of the note of moral condemnation in his statement but can see no other way to interpret Percy Shelley's statement in his Preface that "Revenge, retaliation, atonement are pernicious mistakes." Sperry suggests that the reader is driven to weigh up murder and incest:

on the one hand murder, parricide; the most heinous of crimes; the betrayal of one's begetter to whom, as the source of our being,

honor and obedience are naturally due. Yet weigh against this our revulsion at incestuous rape, a violation, moreover, that is deliberately mediated as the culminating cruelty against an innocent child who merits love and not dishonor. (423)

He is right about the scales operating in the play, although Beatrice is not a child in the modern conception of the term.

There is little doubt that this is a complex play open to a range of interpretations, with Act 5 the centre of most critics' concerns. Yet for Mary Shelley, Act 5 is a "masterpiece," "the finest thing he [Percy Shelley] ever wrote."

The varying feelings of Beatrice are expressed with passionate, heart—reaching eloquence. Every character has a voice that echoes truth in its tones. It is curious, to one acquainted with the written story, to mark the success with which the poet has inwoven the real incidents of the tragedy into his scenes, and yet, through the power of poetry, has obliterated all that would otherwise have shown too harsh or too hideous in the picture. His success was a double triumph; and often after he was earnestly entreated to write again in a style that commanded popular favour, while it was not less instinct with truth and genius. ("Note on *The Cenci*", 158)

For Mary Shelley, Beatrice is not inconsistent. She is expressing "varying feelings," feelings that reflect the "real incidents" of the story, which Percy Shelley has been able to portray without being too harsh or too hideous. From this perspective the seeming contradictions in the character of Beatrice make sense and her radical shifts gain coherence. Beatrice exhibits moments of great rationality and moments where she seems on the edge of madness. Her psychic boundaries collapse and re-form. It is not the Beatrice of the early parts of the play who helps make the decision to have Cenci murdered but the violated daughter of marriageable age whose body has been ruined by her father. Incest polluted Beatrice, its consequences ruined the family as even the murder of the two eldest sons had not. Beatrice's perspective on life changed and in participating in her father's murder she hastens the disintegration and destruction of the family. The

only family member left at the end is Bernardo and Beatrice admits he will carry the family scars. Beatrice's dilemma is irresolvable. To do nothing after the rape is to ensure further torture: to keep herself in the position of her father's victim. Throughout their active roles in the murder Beatrice and Lucretia regain agency and leave Bernardo a future—releasing him from victimhood—reconstituting the family.

### MATHILDA

Although the entire novel as a letter is a response to the incest, the latter part of Mathilda's story focuses on her response to her father's incestuous declaration and her growing acknowledgement of her own love for him. She admits while reading his suicide note that he is her lover. As she tries to deal with this revelation, she brings about her exile and contemplates suicide. She also acknowledges that the declaration of incest is a fall from ignorance. Just after her father returns Mathilda talks about the despair that will come. She had "no idea that misery could arise from love" but learnt the lesson "in a manner few are obliged to receive it":

I lament now, I must ever lament, those few short months of Paradisaical bliss; I disobeyed no command, I ate no apple, and yet I was ruthlessly driven from it. Alas! my companion did, and I was precipitated in his fall. But I wander from my relation—let woe come at its appointed time; I may at this stage of my story still talk of happiness. (189)

She warns the reader that her paradise is about to be shattered but she is no Eve, in fact her father is like Eve and she is like Adam, the roles are reversed. Mary Shelley—as will be seen—subverts many such roles in this novel. For example, it was a concern throughout the long eighteenth century that women were poorly educated because they read too many frivolous romantic novels whereas in *Mathilda*, the father is the poorly educated romance reader. Rather than the

familiar female or Eve figure transgressing it is the male, the Adam figure, who does so. This is a vital clue to understand Mathilda's relationship with her father. Her father's declaration of incestuous desire removes her from the world of innocence (predicated upon sexual ignorance), and introduces her to the world of knowledge. The fall introduces her to notions of sexuality and desire, to the paradigm of sexual love. In retrospect, the fall changes her attitude to events, which, of course, she is recounting in her tale. In her Edenic world before the declaration, Mathilda was oblivious to the sexual. Before the fall, it does not occur to her that her love is part of a sexual narrative, it is in the process of writing her tale that she begins to understand and work out what has happened. One of her courses of action is to imagine staging her own death and resurrecting herself and father as non-sexual beings. In her move to the moors, she also makes her life non-sexual, likening it to the life of a nun. This strips her life of all the sensuality and indulgence that also come with her father and his wealth. She starts to follow in the footsteps of her aunt whose coldness suggests a repressed sexuality.

Mathilda's admission of love for her father comes the morning after his declaration when she reads the letter of remorse and farewell that he has left while she slept:

He must know that if I believed that his intention was merely to absent himself from me that instead of opposing him it would be that which I should myself require—or if he thought that any lurking feeling, yet he could not think that, should lead me to him would he endeavour to overthrow the only hope he could have of ever seeing me again; a lover, there was madness in the thought, yet he was my lover, would not act thus. No, he had determined to die, and he wished to spare me the misery of knowing it. (211)

She acknowledges here that he is her lover—as mad as the thought is. This is the most overt acknowledgement in the text that she returns his love. This explains her need to follow him when just a few paragraphs earlier she thought never to see

him again. The thought of his dying “froze” (211) her blood. Memories of her dream make her half-crazed as they follow her father toward the sea. She says to her steward:

“Mark, Gaspar, if the next flash of lightning rend not that oak my father will be alive.”

I had scarcely uttered these words than a flash instantly followed by a tremendous peal of thunder descended on it; and when my eyes recovered their sight after the dazzling light, the oak no longer stood in the meadow—The old man uttered a wild exclamation of horror when he saw so sudden an interpretation given to my prophecy. I started up, my strength returned with my terror; I cried, “Oh God! Is this thy decree? Yet perhaps I shall not be too late.” (213)

Twice she predicts his death and that is how she finds him, laid out on a bed in a cottage by the sea. The prophecies seem to indicate that at some level she understands the depth of her father’s guilt in declaring his incestuous desire.

Immediately after her father’s suicide, Mathilda falls ill and when she recovers is numb:

I often said to myself, my father is dead. He loved me with a guilty passion, and stung by remorse and despair he killed himself. Why is it that I feel no horror? Are these circumstances not dreadful? Is it not enough that I shall never more meet the eyes of my beloved father; never more hear his voice; no caress, no look? All cold, and stiff, and dead! Alas! I am quite callous: the night I was out in was fearful and the cold rain that fell about my heart has acted like the waters of the cavern of Antiparos and has changed it to stone. I do not weep or sigh; but I must reason with myself, and force myself to feel sorrow and despair. This is not resignation that I feel, for I am dead to all regret. (215)

She feels only numbness as if she has been turned to stone. Cold reason has removed her emotion, her horror and despair at her father’s declaration and death. Mathilda finds herself surrounded by female relations she wants to escape:

I found if sorrow was dead within me, so was love and desire of sympathy. Yet sorrow only slept to revive more fierce, but love never woke again—its ghost, ever hovering over my father’s grave, alone survived—since his death all the world was to me a blank except where woe had stamp’d its burning words telling me to smile

no more—the living were not fit companions for me, and I was ever meditating by what means I might shake them all off, and never be heard of again. (215)

She feels unfit for “human conversation” in much the same way that Clarintha did. However, her feelings are more complex in that she does not just acknowledge her father’s love, she returns that love. There is much ambivalence about the love. At times like the declaration that he is her “lover” she seems to return his sexual passion, at other times, as will be seen, she seeks a sexless union with him. In fact, at times she seems to fear the physical. Her love for her father survives his death preventing her from loving anyone else. She now seeks solitude from her “fellow creatures”:

There was too deep a horror in my tale for confidence; I was on earth the sole depository of my own secret. I might tell it to the winds and to the desert heaths but I must never among my fellow creatures, either by word or look give allowance to the smallest conjecture of the dread reality: I must shrink before the eye of man lest he should read my father’s guilt in my glazed eyes: I must be silent lest my faltering voice should betray unimagined horrors. Over the deep grave of my secret I must heap an impenetrable heap of false smiles and words: cunning frauds, treacherous laughter, and a mixture of all light deceits would form a mist to blind others and be as the poisonous simoon to me. I, offspring of love, the child of the woods, the nursling of Nature’s bright self was to submit to this? I dared not. (216)

She believes her eyes will betray her, that other men can see her love for her father and his guilt. This contrasts with Beatrice’s eyes, which unsettle others but never betray her. Mathilda also fears that she will not be able to remain silent, so works at deceiving everyone but knows she cannot sustain this. She feigns death. This casts her in the shoes of her father who had also run from grief at Diana’s death and his declaration of love for Mathilda. However, Mathilda will not be able to get away from her grief whereas her father’s grief for Diana seemed to have faded by the time he returned to Mathilda’s life. Mathilda’s grief cannot as easily

fade because being incestuous it is tinged with guilt and despair and now knowledge of the sexual but not in a positive sense. Pushing her father to declare his incestuous love has, Susan Allen Ford argues, plunged Mathilda “into the dark world of experience” (65):

Once the desire has been articulated, once the forbidden meaning has been discovered, the family structure can only implode, and both fathers and daughters, deprived of that support, have no possibility for relationship, no place in the world, no support for the self. Shelley’s Mathilda describes herself as a “wretched self” as the “source of guilt that wants a name”. Indeed, that very namelessness is what she has struggled against. (65)

Ford argues that Mathilda’s father sees “articulation as a deadly and powerful temptation” whereas Mathilda sees it “as an unburdening” (66); “articulation, of course, separates father from daughter and both from the rest of the world” (66). In this case, Mathilda’s idea of her father’s unburdening being therapeutic does not work. Her father is closer to understanding the effect of his unburdening and the guilt that will come. Hence, Mathilda’s need for exile or death; a mixture of the two is what she ends up with: feigned death, exile disguised as suicide.

Mathilda disappears leaving behind a suicide letter. Peace comes as she heads to northern England in her “fanciful nun-like dress” (219). This is a sign of her wanting to repress her sexuality as nuns did. She begins a simple life, feeds the birds, and animals and amuses herself with her harp and books. However, she is different: while she is confined to nature and books as she was in her childhood, it is no longer the same. Then she “bounded across the fields” (22) and was joyful; she “drank in joy with life” (220). Her steps were light and her eyes clear. Now her:

walk was slow—My eyes were seldom raised and often filled with tears; no song; no smiles; no careless notion that might bespeak a mind intent on what surrounded it—I was gathered up into

myself—a selfish solitary creature ever pondering on my regrets and faded hopes. (220)

She describes her life as “idle, useless” (220). She could not suicide because that would “violate a divine law of nature” (221), so she endures the “crawling hours and minutes” trying not to dwell on the “reality of crime” (221).

After two years as her “immediate suffering wore off” (222), she becomes more human and wishes for one friend to love her but she still does not think she is “fitted to return to society” (223). The poet Woodville, who receives more attention in the chapter on the suitor, soon arrives. Mathilda relates his history so the reader can “judge how cold” (223) her heart was when it could not be “warmed by his eloquent words and tender sympathy” (223). Since he was also in grief, there should have been “mutual consolation” (223) but she had been “hardened by stone by the Medusa head of misery” (223). His grief is “natural” (223) and would not destroy but “purify the heart” (223) and “when its shadow had passed from over him, shine forth brighter and happier than before” (223). She therefore implies her grief is “unnatural” as was her father’s death. Her solitude and experiences saw her “become arrogant, peevish, and above all suspicious” (234). Mathilda will tell one more instance of her “sad suspicion and despair” (234) and how the goodness and angel power of Woodville “softened” her “rugged feelings” leading her “back to gentleness” (234). She plots for them to die together:

He says all hope is dead to him, and I know that it is dead to me, so we are both equally fitted for death. Let me try if he will die with me; and as I fear to die alone, if he will accompany to cheer me, and thus he can shew himself my friend in the only manner my misery will permit. (235)

She plans the scene—which Charlene Bunnell argues is one of the most theatrical of the novel—even “procured Laudanum” and then invites him to die with her, to



“accompany” her on her “dark journey” (“Mathilda: Mary Shelley’s Romantic Tragedy” 235); She promises that if he dies with her he will find Elinor and she what she has lost, that is her father. He gracefully refuses, but soothes her so that when he leaves she feels calm. She does not stay that way for long:

for I was doomed while in life to grieve, and to the natural sorrow of my father’s death and its most terrific cause, imagination added a ten-fold weight of woe. I believed myself to be polluted by the unnatural love I had inspired, and that I was a creature cursed and set apart by nature. I thought that like another Cain, I had a mark set on my forehead to shew mankind that there was a barrier between me and them. (238)

Like Beatrice and Clarintha, she is set apart from other humans and feels polluted. She also believes that she “inspired” the “unnatural love” (238). She sees a barrier between herself and others. Unlike Clarintha and Beatrice, she believes that she is marked, because she loves her father. Mathilda’s father’s love is more like the sexual passion felt by Clarintha’s father than the desire for power that drove Cenci to rape, although, as shown, Mathilda’s father does not attempt to rape her despite making an approach to her bedroom door. His love remained a frustrated and obsessive desire and sexual love and unlike the other two fathers he turns the violence against himself rather than directing it at his daughter.

Mathilda says her soul is “corrupted to its core by a deadly cancer” (239):

if day after day I had dwelt on these dreadful sentiments I should have become mad, and should have fancied myself a living pestilence: so horrible to my own solitary thoughts did this form, this voice, and all this wretched self appear; for had it not been the source of guilt that wants a name? (239)

She cannot name the source of her guilt. The more Woodville tries to win her confidence so she can tell him her “dark tale” (239), the more keenly she felt “the withering fear that I was in truth a marked creature, a pariah, only fit for death” (239). Soon she is as unhappy as she was before trying to make a death pact with

Woodville. He leaves to attend his ill mother telling her to let hope guide her away from despair and heal her. She goes walking and while thinking about her father becomes lost: “I walked on wondering when the time would come when we should all four, my dearest father, restored to me, meet in some sweet paradise” (241). Unable to find her way home, she is out all night and falls ill with “every symptom of a rapid consumption” (243). In many ways this is the outcome of her strong will to die. She soon realises she is dying and to contemplates her death:

I see how this is, and it is strange that I should have deceived myself so long; I am about to die an innocent death, and it will be sweeter even than that which the opium promised. (243)

Her death—unlike the suicide she planned—will now be innocent. She looks forward to being reunited with her father:

In truth I am in love with death; no maiden ever took more pleasure in contemplation of her bridal attire than I in fancying my limbs already enwrap in their shroud: is it not my marriage dress? Alone it will unite me to my father when in an eternal mental union we shall never part. (244)

She imagines meeting her father in a shroud that will be like a wedding dress, another example of her returning her father’s love. She looks forward to an “eternal mental union” with him. In death, she imagines they can have a loving relationship beyond the sexual. Audra Dibert Himes offers an alternative arguing that “the plot of her [Mathilda’s] life and text” (122) turns when she confesses that her father is her “lover”:

When the plot of her life and text takes this turn, Mathilda turns with it. Instead of willing her now dead father back to life, she wills herself to death. Mathilda states that she looks forward to death because “alone it will unite me to my father when in an eternal mental union we shall never part.” Her death is a *liebestod*, an extension of her sexual desire. Her phrase “an eternal mental union” is her carnal desire disguised and an excellent demonstration of her use of ambivalence as a technique of self-cloistering. (123)

This is an extremely ambiguous moment. Marriage as indicated by the wedding dress introduces the notion of sex to the relationship and yet Mathilda wants a “mental union” which suggests a connection of minds not bodies.

Mathilda is just twenty when she writes her story with, as Charlene Bunnell suggests, its “conscious use of theatrical metaphors” suggesting “her melodramatic self-indulgence” (77):

Again and again I have passed over in my remembrance the different scenes of my short life: if the world is a stage and I merely an actor on it my part has been strange, and, alas! tragical. Almost from infancy I was deprived of all the testimonies of affection which children generally receive; I was thrown entirely upon my own resources, and I enjoyed what I may almost call unnatural pleasures, for they were dreams and not realities. The earth was to me a magic lantern and I [a] gazer, and a listener but no actor; but then came the transporting and soul-reviving era of my existence: my father returned and I could pour my warm affections on a human heart; there was a new sun and a new earth created to me; the waters of existence sparkled: joy! joy! but, alas! what grief! My bliss was more rapid than the progress of a sunbeam on a mountain, which discloses its glades and woods, and then leaves it dark and blank; to my happiness followed madness and agony, closed by despair. (*Mathilda* 245)

Mathilda talks about her life being a drama in which the final act is her writing her story. In this drama, her part was “tragical.” Her “unnatural” childhood pleasures forecast the future, a time in which she would take part in life. The return of her father brings joy but eventually despair.

Mathilda acknowledges Woodville as her “only living friend” (245) and bids him farewell. Her release comes in May, the month of her initial trauma:

I now behold the glad sun of May. It was May, four years ago, that I first saw my beloved father; it was in May, three years ago that my folly destroyed the only being I was doomed to love. May is returned, and I die. (246)

This is another admission of her love for her father. Himes suggests that:

In this, the penultimate paragraph of her confession, Mathilda breaks her silence about her passion for her father and names it

“love.” Perhaps this naming of her desire is really the purpose of this confession. She does not seek absolution; she seeks realization for herself of what she feels. (126)

She thinks of her father again and how she is soon to meet him in another world.

Mathilda is portrayed as displaying similar selfishness to her father. She was able to run wild in the natural environment at her Scottish home but was prevented from making friends with the local children—thus was indulged in terms of freedom to run wild on the property but deprived in terms of having adequate human interaction and company. She therefore began to become obsessed with her father. Once the declaration of incestuous desire is made, she is unable to exist in society—she feels polluted and excluded, set apart. As a child she engaged with nature, now as a daughter of marriageable age she feels “a wretch on whom Nature had set her ban” (229). She wants to die, believing this will reunite her with her father. She conceives of herself as innocent yet she pushed her father to reveal his incestuous desire and then gradually admits her own. She sees herself as lacking judgment just as Oedipus did. She should have listened to her father and given him the time he asked instead of pushing him to reveal his emotions. This perception of innocence gives her victim status. At the beginning, she presents herself as a victim: how can we continue to see her this way when she returns her father’s desire? This desire is revealed through her two admissions and references to *Myrrha*, *The Captain*, and through likening herself to loves like Ghismunda. Mathilda talks of returning her father’s love and going to her death dressed as his bride. Finally, she is unable to love anyone but her father. She cannot even love Woodville and he becomes her failed suitor.

The fact that *Mathilda* contains father-daughter incest not physically consummated allows the writer to pose questions more difficult to answer once

violation has occurred. The language of the text shows that Mathilda returns the desire felt by her father. Mathilda's expression of feeling alienated, monstrous and "not fit for human company," makes it easy to accept modern medical and psychological readings. The ambiguity Mathilda feels—in love with her father, disgust with her father—is read as consistent with the feelings that girls experience when they are abused (see Judith Lewis Herman's *Father-Daughter Incest*). Also Mathilda is not always reliable, often the reader is forced to ask what she has left out. The nature of Mathilda's centrality in comparison to Clarinthia's and Beatrice's means that there is more scope for her feelings, emotions and expressions to unfold in the novel. Mathilda's position as the narrator gives the reader little reprieve from this intense experience. The confessional form is intensified by the "Romantic" nature of the tale—its Romantic tropes—the isolated, bleak landscape and the passionate language. Mathilda both loves and desires her father in a way that she deems unnatural and monstrous. As Himes says:

The tightly confined internal and external spaces of and around the title character, who as the scriptor of this confessional work, force the reader to participate with Mathilda in the text. The reader cannot objectively receive the novel but must engage with Mathilda in her psychological landscape, and that is an area fraught with ambivalence created by vacillation between two equally powerful poles: Mathilda's position as both the subject and the object of the verb "to desire." This ambivalence promotes the structural and intellectual underpinning for the story as a whole, both within the text, and by extension within the consciousness of the responding reader. (115)

Unlike the other two texts, Mathilda is in total control of her narrative and her ambivalence towards her role in the events and its outcomes punctuates the text. The reader is totally reliant on Mathilda whereas in both *Exilius* and *The Cenci*, there are outside views or at least alternative views to that of the daughter for

most events. The reader is forced to make judgments about the reliability of Mathilda. At times she seems to recall events with clarity, at others emotion clouds her vision. Unlike Clarinthia and Beatrice, Mathilda—who is completely in control of the structure she chooses to tell her story—states at the outset that her tale was “unfit for utterance” (175). The only way she can utter it is in a private letter and yet it has suggestions of being a more public statement when she says she will write it as though others were reading it. As Bunnell argues, Mathilda’s construction of her tale is theatrical:

Indulging an excessively introspective sensibility, Mathilda constructs her autobiography as a dramatic tragedy that reveals an egocentric view of life as a stage on which she, a tragic actress, performs the leading role as an incest victim. (“Mathilda: Mary Shelley’s Romantic Tragedy” 75)

Some of the ambivalence in *Mathilda*, then, is caused by the way Mathilda tells the story, the deliberate gaps, not just her own ambivalence to her father’s incestuous impulse. Depicted is a family under stress because the boundaries of “natural” and “unnatural” have blurred on the part of both father and daughter. Yet, the language is transgressive casting daughter in position of lover and likewise father in position of lover, rather than in the more conventional positions of father and daughter. Himes argues that in the end, the reader who is placed in the position of Mathilda’s confessor is left in a difficult position and having to make a judgment:

But in the end, Mathilda does not wish for expiation from the reader/confessor for her sin of desire because that would amount to an emptying of desire from herself. Instead, she wishes for an even closer union with her father, the “eternal mental union” from which “we shall never part.”

This is not a comfortable ending for the reader. Because Mathilda’s incestuous desire crosses the taboo line, the reader instinctively wishes for a closing that will rectify the character of Mathilda. However, the reader’s desire for an ending in which Mathilda would renounce her “unnatural” desire clashes with

Mathilda's desire to experience the desire of her father more fully.  
(125-126)

Thus Himes argues that the reader has difficulty in accepting Mathilda's desire and of absolving her of its "societally defined sinfulness" (126). In the end the reader cannot "resolve the tensions between her or his desire for an ending that is empty of desire and Mathilda's desire to fulfill her desire, prevent any real closure" (126). The outcome of the declaration of incest is the destruction of the family and the exile of the daughter who no longer feels she has the right to participate in her familiar social world. The need for exile is not just, however, about the daughter being tainted with the father's desire, it is about the fact that she is complicit in that incestuous desire.

### CONCLUSION

The struggle to articulate their experience of incest has been difficult, sometimes impossible, for each of the three daughters—Clarinthia, Beatrice and Mathilda. Incest also occurs in each at the point at which the central daughters reach marriageable age, indicating that this is an important moment within the family where the daughter will either pass across the threshold into marriage or be kept within the space, thus increasing the potential of polluting that space. This is the moment when the daughters are most at risk from their fathers within their familial space. Incest can result making the marriage exchange go wrong. Although the basic narratives of these three daughters are different and each has her own strategies in response to their dilemma, each uses similar language to speak incest. Each text clearly demonstrates that incest sexually contaminates and thereby destroys the family space. While the domestic implications of father-daughter incest become clear through reading the daughter, the male figures of the

incest triad, the suitor and the father, open the wider dimensions. These two figures are the subjects of Part II of this thesis.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Many texts of this century feature incest but often the incest, particularly in father-daughter narratives, dissipates at the text's moment of crisis. The type of incest that occurs within the fiction includes guardian-ward, uncle-niece, father-in-law and daughter-in-law, mother-son, brother-sister. Many are threatened or averted although there are a number in which the incest takes place, such as the three featured in this thesis. The incest narratives concerning guardians and wards include Delarivier Manley's *The New Atalantis* (1709) (also includes brother-sister incest); Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719-20); Elizabeth Helme's *Louise, or the Cottage on the Moor* (1787); Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791); Mary Darby Robinson's *The False Friend* (1799); Sarah Sheriffe's *Correlia, or the Mystic Tomb* (1802) (also includes half-sister and brother incest). The texts featuring daughter-in-law and father-in-law incest include Eliza Haywood's *The Fatal Secret; Or Constancy in Distress* (1724); Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764); and Mrs Carver's *The Horrors of Oakdale Abbey* (1797). Uncle-niece incest appears in Henry MacKenzie's *Man of the World* (1773); Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791); Eliza Parson's *Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793); Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797); Joseph Fox's *Santamaria, or, the Mysterious Pregnancy* (1797); RMP Yorke's *The Romance of Smyra* (1801); T.J. Horsley Curties's *Ancient Records* (1801) and *St Botolph's Priory* (1806). Mother and son incest is found in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) and Horace Walpole's *The Mysterious Mother* (1768). Brother and sister incest is particularly prolific and is a theme in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722); Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *A Journey From This World to the Next* (1743) and *Amelia* (1751); Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* (1747-1748); anonymous, *Genuine Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Maria Brown* (1766); Sophie Briscoe's *The New Clarissa; or, the History of Miss Melmouth* (1771); Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778); Sophie Lee's *The Recess* (1783-85); Mary Robinson's *Vancenza* (1792); Eliza Fenwick's *Secrecy* (1795); Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796); and William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1798). Surrogate brother-sister incest appears in Stephen Cullen's *The Hated Priory* (1794); Eleanor Sleath's *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798); May Meeke's *Midnight Weddings* (1802); Francis Latham's *Astonishment!!!* (1802); Mrs S. Sykes's *Margiana* (1808); Anna Mackenzie's *The Irish Guardian* (1809); Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814); John William Polidori's *Ernestus Berchtold, or, The Modern Prometheus* (1819); Thomas Gaspey's *The Mystery, or, Forty Years Ago* (1820); and Francis Jamieson's *The House of Ravenspur* (1822). Father-daughter incest is averted in Elizabeth Holme's *The Farmer of Inglewood Forest* (1796); and Elizabeth Sophia Tomlins's *Rosalind de Tracy* (1798). There are also many novels where incest incidents are referred to in passing but not a prevalent part of the text, for example, in Eliza Haywood's *Memoirs of a Certain Island Adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia* (1725) a father and daughter are suspected of incest but the narrator decides not to discover whether it is true. There are also many texts with incestuous overtones rather than conclusions such as Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* where the first cousin wants to marry Emmeline.

<sup>2</sup> I will use "reader" in recognition that I am dealing with *The Cenci* as a literary text rather than a theatrical performance. This is not an acceptance of the fact that, as many critics have argued, this play is unfit for the stage.

## PART II

The social and political worlds of *Exilius*, *The Cenci* and *Mathilda* are patriarchal. Each text acknowledges that fathers are rightfully head of the household and governors in the political sphere. Alongside the father and ready to be inducted to full power are two more male figures—brothers and suitors, both of whom will assume a full patriarchal role as they too become husbands and then fathers. Each text posits that balancing patriarchal power is a set of duties and obligations, which should see the male figure provide for and look after his family. In these three texts, the patriarchy goes wrong as incest upsets the delicate balance. The fathers lose sight of their obligations and duties as they focus on the sexuality of their daughters.

This section of the thesis, which will be divided into two chapters, will focus on two male figures with roles in the father-daughter incest in these texts—the suitor(s) and the father. With the impetus to recover and understand the daughter's voice, the male figures are often neglected in the analysis of incest narratives. There is an assumption that the father is a patriarch who is abusing his power and needs no further explanation than this. In addition, the suitor is missed because he is not a familiar figure of contemporary father-daughter incest narratives. Unlike the contemporary narratives which as child sexual abuse focuses on the child-daughter rather than the daughter of marriageable age, those of the long eighteenth century framed as the marriage exchange gone wrong require a suitor.

Just as the domestic concerns of the text emerged through the figure of the daughter, the political and social concerns of each text become apparent through

these male figures. While the daughter can only articulate the domestic implications of father-daughter incest, the male figures are able to move between the domestic and the political and social spaces and are thus able to articulate or represent these worlds. Even if they are not seen beyond the domestic sphere within the narrative, as for example in the case of Cenci, their power, experience and ability to speak of the social and political is clear. I will argue that a close reading of the suitor(s) and fathers brings to light a Jacobite reading in *Exilius* focussed on returning the exiled king, a critique of the worst kind of patriarchal society in *The Cenci*, and a criticism of a society that allows excesses and self-indulgence in *Mathilda*.

The suitor is the subject of the first chapter. The suitor(s) alert the father to the daughter's attainment of marriageable age and her sexuality and act as a contrast to or point of comparison with the father, the instigator of the incestuous action. In doing so the suitor highlights both the immoral character of the father, and problems within the social system that produced this father. The second chapter focuses on the father, the wealthy patriarch, and his motivation towards incest. Both Turpius and Mathilda's fathers sexually desire their daughters while Cenci simply sees rape as another method of torturing Beatrice. While, as shown in Part I, the daughters in *Exilius*, *The Cenci* and *Mathilda* are central and largely the holders of the viewpoint in the texts—with the exception of *The Cenci* where Cenci gets to speak to the audience as Beatrice does—the father is in charge. He instigates the incestuous action and remains a focal point even if he dies. I will argue that in some ways each father is shown to be as trapped as his daughter is. The texts do not excuse the father's behaviour but each looks to social and political structures to explain how things happen and why.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE SUITOR

The suitor(s) in *Exilius*, *The Cenci* and *Mathilda* have two main functions. The first straightforward function is to signal to the father that his daughter has become a sexual being and is therefore of marriageable age. Their second function is more complex with the character of the main suitor tested against that of the father. The comparison of these male figures, which will be developed through this chapter and finalised in the chapter on the father, reveals problems in the social and political worlds of the texts. Despite having similar functions, the suitor(s) within each text vary enormously in their relationship to the daughter and the father and will be looked at in turn.

*Exilius* has two suitors—Valerius, Turpius's illegitimate son, chosen by Turpius as a marriage partner for Clarinthia, who underscores Turpius's immoral nature, and Asiaticus the hero of the novel, who is everything that Turpius fails to be, a kind, benevolent and effective patriarch capable of restoring order on the domestic and political fronts. Valerius's marriage to Clarinthia would have been an incestuous union but he pursues the notion of them marrying, despite Clarinthia's objections, in a bid to take control of the family wealth. After Turpius's death he assumes the role of the family patriarch and begins to control Clarinthia's life as her father did. Although he follows in his father's footsteps, Valerius can still be saved. By the end, Clarinthia's forgiveness and his love for Artemisa place his life on a more virtuous footing and by all accounts he will not descend as far into the immoral as his father did. Asiaticus on the other hand, starkly contrasts with Turpius. He saves Clarinthia from the attempted rape by her father and is then followed through a series of adventures, which prove his ability

to lead in the political sphere as well as to emulate his father in assuming responsibility for the family with care to his duties and obligations.

Cenci is adamant that there will be no suitor for Beatrice and, in fact, there is no suitable marriage partner for her in the play. Orsino, however, places himself in that role unbeknownst to Cenci. In conversation with Beatrice, he says he wants to marry her, although he then tells the audience that he will have her without the marriage. Orsino as a dishonest man and a priest eager to ignore his vow of chastity underscores the corruption of the patriarchal Roman world that the Cenci family inhabits. Unlike Asiaticus who is the opposite to Turpius, Orsino is following in Cenci's wake. He is the patriarch of the future who will use and abuse the system to attain his own ends.

Like *Exilius*, *Mathilda* features two suitors. The first suitor is the unnamed young man of rank who awakens Mathilda's father to the fact that his daughter is a desirable sexual being and that without realising it he himself has come to desire her. The second, Woodville, is a suitor who is not a suitor. Mathilda is ambivalent about Woodville. Sometimes she casts him as a suitor, comparing him to her father as if she were comparing lover to lover. At other times she represents him as a failed suitor because he is unable to help her overcome her incestuous love for her father and bring a new domestic harmony to her world. Sometimes he is imaged as an angel who is going to save her, but he never does. Despite his failures, he is shown to be everything that Mathilda's father was not. Unlike Mathilda's father who abandons Mathilda and his properties, Woodville takes his patriarchal duty seriously. He stops Mathilda's suicide and attends to his duty towards his mother. He also has a suitable education and although he does not

have the wealth to indulge himself as Mathilda's father did, the text suggests he would not succumb anyway.

## THE SUITORS IN *EXILIUS*

### VALERIUS

Valerius's main function is to precipitate Turpius's sexual desire for his daughter. The more Turpius argues with Clarinthia about Valerius as a potential husband, the more he places her in the position of desirable being. He no longer sees her as child but as sexual woman, one who is in the image of her mother, his former wife. Thus, the father-daughter incest comes to represent the marriage exchange gone wrong, that is the exchange is compromised by the father's desire for his daughter. In this case, the marriage exchange goes wrong in the daughter's generation after a marriage contract has gone wrong in her parents'—her father's adultery initiates a trajectory of incest.

Valerius's second function is to contrast with his father. He is the instrument of his father's incestuous plans but through a transformation demonstrates how one on an immoral path may be saved. In comparison, his father had remained on the path of immorality for much longer, although he too will be saved in the end. Valerius does not tell his own story; his thoughts and actions are represented through Clarinthia's and Cordiala's tales and by the narrator, indicating his functionary status. Further he is portrayed as a puppet to his mother Asbella and his father Turpius although Asbella has the greatest influence.

In the wake of the attempted rape, as shown in the chapter on the daughter, Valerius assumes his father's patriarchal role and Clarinthia comes to fear him. Although Clarinthia manages to send him into a depressed state when she attacks

him about the incestuous nature of their relationship, she is never able to manipulate him as his mother does. The more he pressures her the more she dislikes him:

How happy did I esteem those Nymphs of Old, who by the Pity of the Gods were transform'd into Plants or Animals, by which they avoided the Embraces of their hated Lovers. And indeed *Valerius* was now become such to me, this contrivance having raz'd out all those Characters of Friendship and fraternal Love, which his virtuous and generous Behaviour had engraven in my Heart before; and I now detested and abhor'd him as the worst of Criminals. Sometimes I resolv'd to cast my self into the Deep, and so become a Sacrifice to *Neptune*, rather than a victim to his incestuous Love; sometimes to force my self upon those iron Spikes on the Banisters, with a Thousand other extravagant Thoughts, which Reason, or want of Courage render'd abortive. (I: 47-48)

Although she cannot bring herself to suicide, Clarinthia imagines it as an escape from her brother in his role as lover. Valerius born out of the adulterous relationship between Asbella and Turpius is depicted as on the same immoral life path as his mother and father. Yet he can be saved. The poisoning and disfigurement of Turpius and Asbella, which will be examined in greater detail in the chapter on the father, is the beginning of the change. After the poisoning he looks after Turpius and Asbella as a dutiful son, although he does not fully trust Turpius and locks him in the same room that earlier caged Clarinthia. Once Turpius escapes, Valerius follows him to the house of Publius Scipio where he finds Clarinthia. He “casts himself at her Feet, begging Pardon of her and Heaven for all the Trouble he had caus'd her” (II: 120), and she forgives him. He also “humbled himself at the Feet of his Father, who readily receiv'd him” (II: 120), while Asiaticus forgives him only “at the Request of Clarinthia” (II: 120). Asiaticus's reluctance to pardon Valerius is an indication of the gravity with which Asiaticus views Valerius's actions. Valerius's apology and Clarinthia's

forgiveness help restore family harmony, and Valerius's future takes a new more moral turn as he falls in love with Artemisa.

### ASIATICUS

Asiaticus is the hero of the novel, the great conqueror and leader who has taken the prompts from his father Publius Scipio and is therefore the antithesis of Turpius and Valerius in terms of morality and political ability. Together he and Clarintha must overcome the hurdle of Turpius's death in order for the marriage exchange to work as it should, instead of going wrong as it does with Turpius's poor choice of Valerius as suitor for his daughter and then his own growing desire and the attempted rape. Asiaticus's role in the Jacobite plot of this novel is to provide an example of a great conqueror. As such he is everything that William of Orange was not, a rightful conqueror and able to bring the exiles home.

Asiaticus is known in the novel as Scipio when he is described as Clarintha's childhood love, as Lysander when he is trying to conceal his identity after he believes he has murdered Turpius, and finally as Asiaticus, the great Asian conqueror. It is well into the novel before it is clear that these three figures are in fact the one man whose presence is felt from the beginning. He is introduced in the first two stories told by Clelia and Clarintha, and he tells his own story in Book II. Clelia introduces him as a conqueror as she talks to his sister Scipiana describing him as a generous man, intent on acknowledging publicly how much he owed his success on the battlefield to help from an unidentified stranger (who turns out to be Exilius, the figure of the novel's title).<sup>1</sup>

Although Asiaticus seems a proper suitor for a young woman like Clarintha, their love is tested time and again. They have to somehow resolve the issue of the murder of her father before they are free to love openly and marry.



Clarinthia expresses this clearly when she is reunited with Asiaticus, now calling himself Lysander, after she escapes from Asbella's castle. Upon seeing him again she faints. Returning to consciousness she says:

The first Object that presented it self to my opening Eyes, was *Lysander's* Face all bathed in Tears, making me such extravagant Protestations of his Joy and Love, as is impossible to repeat; then kissing my Hands a Thousand Times, on his Knees begg'd me to pronounce his Doom, forasmuch as it was evident by my swoonding at the Sight of him, that he was not indifferent to me; but whether he was the Object of my Inclination or Aversion was doubtful, but he fear'd the latter, having been so unfortunate as to render me fatherless. This plain Declaration put me to a great Confusion, that I scarce knew what to reply, for I knew I ought not to receive favourably such a Declaration from a Man that had bereav'd me of my Father; and on the other side, Gratitude as well as Inclination forbad me to treat him harshly, who had defended mine Honour, and now saved my Life. (I: 50-51)

This is the crux of Clarinthia's problem. How can she weigh up her love for Asiaticus and her thankfulness that he saved her from rape against the fact that he killed her father? Clarinthia tells him that although she will always love him, "Fortune has been so unkind" (I: 51) to her that she cannot expect to become his wife. He made her "a Thousand Protestations of his everlasting Love, in which was contain'd more Extasie and Rapture than" (I: 51) she was able to repeat. All in all it was a:

. . . Testimony of a sincere and virtuous Passion. Virtuous was his Mien, Words, and Actions, which was to me a greater Assurance of his Love than many Years Service, replenish'd with numerous and large Declarations, rich Presents, publick Acts of Gallantry, in Honour of my Beauty, and a Thousand other Arts used by the Sex to engage ours. (I: 51)

The virtuous and sincere Asiaticus, who does not take advantage of Clarinthia despite her being in his company unchaperoned, contrasts with Turpius who attempted to rape her and Valerius who was on track to repeat his father's act, when Clarinthia escaped Asbella's castle. Asiaticus treats Clarinthia with utmost

respect and moral behaviour. This history of his treatment of her is clear when he tells his own story in Book II—which stresses his importance in the novel because Turpius and Valerius are not given this opportunity. He starts out by reinforcing Clarinthia’s version of their childhood acquaintance as innocent love (II: 24) that was “without Artifice” (II: 25) and did not go beyond the boundaries and offend propriety or obligations to parents. He laments their separation but acknowledges that he needed to be educated and since then has been involved in public affairs. This engagement in public affairs is central to the story. While it is clear from the outset that Asiaticus is a great leader and conqueror, this is demonstrated as he recounts his adventures in Numidia. He is shown to be able to conquer with a combination of force and personality. He leads the Numidian army against Libia and conquers but is also able to show that running a nation includes conquering skills of a different kind, to be able to woo and keep the people happy. And his ability to lead shows despite his own despair at his loss of Clarinthia. He believes her dead, and she likewise thinks he has drowned, after a storm drove his ship on to rocks off the coast of Africa.

Not long after he arrives in Numidia, Asiaticus is erroneously cast in the role of suitor—Boccus the Prince of Mauritania wrongly believes Asiaticus has won the love of Princess Galecia and the Queen of Numidia, Galecia’s mother, fancies herself in love with him. Asiaticus does not see himself as a suitor in either case. His love makes him refuse to engage with the Queen of Numidia:

But I who was devoted, and given to the Memory of my *Clarinthia*, was in Mind and Person nothing but Insensibility and Despair. I remain’d confounded, and ignorant what to say; grant I could not, to refuse was ridiculous and ungrateful, or rather cruel to my self, rendering me a Monster of Nature; for what human Being but my self could refuse Beauty and Grandeur, which so advantageously courted my Acceptance? I wish’d my self dead or annihilated, anything or nothing, to be out of that *Dilemma*. (II: 36)

Like Clarinthia, he describes himself as a “Monster of Nature” (II: 36) having been rendered thus by his love for Clarinthia which meant he could not satisfactorily go on with life. Just like Clarinthia, however, he cannot suicide. He too contemplates a life in exile and sets out for Mount Atlas when he leaves Numidia. There an oracle tells him to return home and he concludes that it is “the Will of Heaven” (II: 62) and, of course, he returns finding both his sister Scipiana and Clarinthia alive.

At first glance, the Numidian adventure seems to be a digression from the central narrative, but it provides the evidence of Asiaticus’s great leadership and conquering skills as well as demonstrating his place in the political sphere, thus contrasting him with Turpius and Valerius and also proving that he would be a suitable husband for Clarinthia. In the story, Princess Galecia kills her intended Prince Boccus after he challenges Asiaticus in a fit of jealousy when he believes Asiaticus in love with Galecia. Although Galecia declares her guilt at Boccus’s death, Asiaticus is jailed because she killed him with Asiaticus’s sword. The King of Mauritania, Boccus’s father, wants the murderer so he can have revenge but the Queen of Numidia having developed a passion for Asiaticus does not want to deliver him to the King. She also fears her subjects who, as Asiaticus says:

malign’d and envy’d the Honours she heap’d upon me, not only as being a Stranger without Rank or Quality, but a *Roman* which entitles a Man to the Hatred of the Universe, for though the World esteems and imitates our Learning Laws, and Manners, yet our growing Glories makes us the object of Envy and Emulation. (II: 40)

She had heaped honours on him after his success against Libia. As Asiaticus considers the way things are represented to the Numidian people political comment creeps into the novel:

the Queen, who believ'd me guilty, represented me innocent, *Boccus*, who knew me innocent, had represented me guilty; the Princess, who was the only Person capable to give a true Information, was believed on no side, which shows, that Men credit what they fancy, and by Degrees think they know what they have only by Hear-Say, and then act according to this mistaken knowledge, mistaken Information and mistaken Fancy. By this means the Numidians began to be in divers Divisions and many Heart-burnings arose amongst them, that the Queen was nonplus'd what to do. (II: 41)

The Numidians are misled and as a result divisions occur among the people.

Asiaticus is insistent that divisions among subjects can destroy a nation. The

Queen further threatens the state when, led by her passions, she offers the future

king, Prince Gala, and his sister Princess Galecia, to the King of Mauritania as

hostages. Asiaticus says she became:

subject to her Passion, or rather such a Slave to her folly, as to overlook her Honour, Interest and her Peoples Happiness in exposing her Children, whose safety ought to have been her principal Care and most tender Concern; and this for me a Stranger not worth her Consideration. (II: 42)

This draws attention back to Turpius who, ruled by his passion, threatened the

family, a vital entity in the state. Although the domestic and political have been

separated in my discussion thus far, in *Exilius* the two are consistently

intertwined: the family is represented as a microcosm of the nation. That is why

Asiaticus finds himself in such an awkward position in Numidia. If he responds to

the Queen as woman and mother, and denies his interest in her, he believes

Princess Galecia will be threatened. If he responds to the Queen as monarch, he

believes the future of the nation will be jeopardised. Unlike the Queen who is led

by her passion, Princess Galecia:

was a Lady of a masculine Spirit, and undervalu'd the little Delicacies of her Sex, making the Study of Philosophy, and the Laws of her Country, her chief Business. (II: 32)

She cares about the people and exhibits leadership skills preferring to “lead an Army in the Field, and endure the Fatigues and Danger of War, than enjoy the Happiness of lazy Peace, and Court pastimes” (II:33). She is also concerned about the future of the state and calls together the nobles to consider her mother’s actions and the impact on the future of the country. She and the nobles disagree. She believes that some of their suggestions have the potential to unhinge the Government and she well knows “how dangerous it is for a King to part with the Reins of Government” (II: 44). Having discovered the meeting, the Queen charges Galecia and the Lords with treason as she continues on her path of destruction.

Asiaticus comments:

It is strange to see what Extravagancies we are subject to, if we follow the Career of our own Passions. Justly may the Philosophers affirm it to be a greater Victory to conquer our selves, than to overcome the Universe. (II: 48)

This comment reflects back on Turpius as well, who was unable to conquer his desires. Asiaticus pities the Queen. Eventually all is solved as Boccus who had feigned death rescues Galecia and kills the Queen. Order is restored when the ideal suitor, in this case Boccus, is found for Galecia. However, there are still issues in Mauritania when Boccus goes home with his new bride. Here Barker has presented her own take on the “warming-pan” scandal. In “The Politics of legitimacy: women and the warming-pan scandal,” Rachel J. Weil says:

The warming-pan scandal—so called because it was often alleged that a supposititious Prince of Wales had been smuggled into the queen's bedchamber in a warming pan as she pretended to give birth—became the subject of numerous rumours, pamphlets and satirical lampoons in the summer and autumn of 1688. (65)

The birth of James II's son “raised the spectre of a Catholic heir to the throne” (67) and so had to be countered. Barker, King says, “never ceased fulminating against” the fiction that “symbolized to her the power of print to propagate and

render inevitable the most astonishing lies” (*Jane Barker, Exile* 141). King suggests that *Exilius* contains a Mauritanian “incident reminiscent of the warming-pan fiction which heaps scorn upon the deluders and a weak-minded populace so easily deluded” (141). She draws attention to Barker’s passage:

This Conceit was so push'd on by those Princes, whose Interest it was that the King should have no Son, that the greater Part of *Mauritania* either believ'd or pretended to believe this real Prince to be an Imposter; by which one sees, how easy it is to impose upon a Populace, who are generally ready to receive any Notion, though never so ridiculous, if it does but diminish the Power of their Superiors. (II: 56)

Throughout the Numidian and following Mauritanian sections, Asiaticus is contrasted with Turpius and Valerius. He is presented as a military hero on an epic stage, a man of many talents and a voice of reason. Only such a great conqueror could save a daughter from the immoral desires of her father. He is also shown as capable of saving a country such as England—a feat that neither James II or William of Orange managed. As Carol Shiner Wilson argues:

William’s troops invaded England. Mistakenly believing that William was close to London and on the verge of deposing him, James II fled the city.

...

The king’s departure from London and William’s subsequent replacement of him became contested and ambiguous territory. Did James abdicate the throne by his hasty departure? Did William usurp the rightful monarch through opportunistic collaboration with treasonous English leaders? Williamites went to great efforts to assure appearances of a legitimate transition of power but few were fooled by this fiction. (xxv)

*Exilius* contains an example of a true conqueror in Asiaticus, who is able to help restore order to the family and the nation by bringing the exiles home. He conquers in Asia and restores peace in Numidia. Then he brings the banished Catullus and his son Exilius back into Roman society, acknowledging that he owes his victory to Exilius. This not only allows them back but brings new

harmony to the family because Exilius will become Asiaticus's brother when he marries Scipiana. It also allows Asiaticus's younger brother to marry Cordiala who at the end is revealed to be Catullus's daughter and Exilius's sister rather than the servant girl she was believed to be. Asiaticus's ability to restore order to the family thus makes him the leading patriarch next to his father. Further aspects of the Jacobite plot will become clearer in the next chapter.

### THE SUITORS IN *THE CENCI*

The fact that there will be no suitor for Beatrice is not raised until Act 4, when Lucretia asks Cenci to consider choosing a husband for Beatrice so that she does not "tempt" him to "hatred, or worse thoughts, if worse there be" (4.1.23).

He answers:

What! Like her sister who has found a home  
To mock my hate from with prosperity?  
Strange ruin shall destroy both her and thee,  
And all that yet remain. My death may be  
Rapid, her destiny outspeeds it. (4.1.24-28)

The unnamed sister demonstrates that it is possible for the marriage exchange to go right but that Cenci does not want this for Beatrice. He equates a husband for Beatrice with her escape, he wants her—and "all that yet remain," her siblings Giacomo and Bernardo—firmly within his grasp and control.

Despite Cenci declaring that there will be no suitor, Orsino casts himself in that role. Orsino has two main functions. The first is to alert the reader that Beatrice has attained marriageable age and is sexually desirable. His second function is to illuminate the corruption of Roman society. Orsino is the patriarch in training; a younger version of Cenci. His machinations are all to his own ends and he wants to wield power just as Cenci does. He is a threat to Cenci because he is prepared to see Cenci murdered so that his desires may be fulfilled exhibiting

the same murderous tendency that is seen in Cenci in the opening of the play. Although Lucretia laments that their only escape is theirs or Cenci's death, the family does not have the means or power to arrange Cenci's murder. It takes Orsino, another male character and one outside the family, to do so.

Orsino is cast in the role of Beatrice's suitor in the play in his first appearance in Act I, Scene 2. Beatrice sees him as a former suitor, one who betrayed their "youthful contract" (1.2.22) by becoming a priest. She now sees him as just a friend, one to whom she will entrust her petition to the Pope and rely on to help her and her family in the murder plot. However, she does have some reservations about him. He has a "sly, equivocating vein / That suits me not" (1.2.28-29) but she never acts on her doubt and her concern that he gives her "false smiles" (1.2.32). Orsino pushes aside her concerns about him being a priest, suggesting that the Pope will give him a dispensation to marry. As the play progresses it becomes clearer that rather than marry her, he simply wishes to possess her sexually.

Unlike the suitors in the other texts, he has his own strong and often malevolent voice shown not just in conversation with others but through two important soliloquies. In the first, he admits that the Pope will never give him a dispensation to marry, alerting the reader to his duplicity and his plans to win Beatrice "at an easier rate" (1.2.67). He also admits having no intention of passing her petition to the Pope because the Pope "might bestow her on some poor relation / Of his sixth cousin, as he did her sister, / And I should be debarred from all access" (1.2.69-70). He does not want her to marry any more than Cenci does. The corruption in the society and the ability of patriarchs such as Cenci to manipulate the world to their own ends are underscored here in the character of



Orsino. His desires for Beatrice are not that different to Cenci's. The implication is that he would be only too happy to rape Beatrice just as Cenci did if that is the only way to achieve his desire. The only difference is that his motivation is to satisfy his sexual appetite; Cenci's is to control her through using rape as an instrument of torture. Thus, Orsino will not pass on the petition to the Pope because he may lose his access to Beatrice. Selfishness comes to the fore.

Secondly, he is sure that Beatrice exaggerates her father's behaviour:

Old men are testy and will have their way;  
A man may stab his enemy, or his vassal,  
And live a free life as to wine or women,  
And with a peevish temper may return  
To a dull home, and rate his wife and children;  
Daughters and wives call this foul tyranny. (1.2.74-79)

He suggests he will be "content, if on my conscience / There rest no heavier sin that what they suffer / From the devices of my love—A net / From which she shall escape not" (1.2.80-83). He wants to entrap Beatrice just as Cenci has entrapped her in the family home. But Beatrice actually unnerves him:

Yet I fear  
Her subtle mind, her awe-inspiring gaze,  
Whose beams anatomize me, nerve by nerve,  
And lay me bare, and make me blush to see  
My hidden thoughts. (1.2.83-87)

He is sure that somehow she can see his thoughts and will see his aims but, as shown in the chapter on the daughter, she ignores her inner warning. He shakes this thought aside remembering that Beatrice is "a friendless girl / Who clings to me, as to her only hope" (1.2.87-88). He finishes by saying that he would be a fool if he let her escape. Thus like Count Cenci, Orsino wants to control Beatrice. His lack of honesty in passing on the petition is emphasized when he lies to Giacomo about its presentation. He tells him that although he "backed it with /

My earnest prayers, and urgent interest; / It was returned unanswered” (2.2.60-62). The reader knows he never presented the petition.

In his second soliloquy at the end of Act 2, Scene 2, he is the first to articulate the possibility of murdering Cenci. He wants to remove the only obstacle, Cenci, who stands in his way of possessing Beatrice. However, he does not want to suggest murder unless he can “profit, yet omit the sin and peril” (2.2.123). He fears Cenci, “a man whose blows outspeed his words” (2.2.125), but is sure that while Cenci lives Beatrice’s dowry will be “a secret grave” (2.2.127). He recognises Beatrice’s inaccessibility but his sexual desire drives him on:

There is no escape:  
Her bright form kneels beside me at the altar,  
And follows me to the resort of men,  
And fills my slumber with tumultuous dreams,  
So, when I wake, my blood seems liquid fire;  
And if I strike to my damp and dizzy head,  
My hot palm scorches it: her very name,  
But spoken by a stranger, makes my heart  
Sicken and pant; and thus unprofitably  
I clasp the phantom of unfelt delights,  
Till weak imagination half possesses  
The self-created shadow. (2.2.132-143)

He dreams of Beatrice, he desires her, he wants those “unfelt delights” (2.2.141) and thinks he will not have to wait or “nurse” the “feverous hours” (2.2.144) much longer. Orsino is working for his own purpose, which will see Beatrice’s father dead and Giacomo “bound” (2.2.148) to him by a “dark secret, surer than the grave” (2.2.149). He also imagines that Lucretia will be “scared and unexpostulating / From the dread manner of her wish achieved” (2.2.150-151). He sees Beatrice as a “friendless maiden” (2.2.153), a daughter of marriageable age with no friends or helpers other than him, thus stressing the daughter’s isolation. At the end of this speech he reflects on his chances of success, judging that he will prosper:

I have such foresight as assures success:  
 Some unbeheld divinity doth ever,  
 When dread events are near, stir up men's minds  
 To black suggestions; and he prospers best,  
 Not who becomes the instrument of ill,  
 But who can flatter the dark spirit, that makes  
 Its empire and its prey of other hearts,  
 Till it become his slave—as I will do. (2.2.154-161)

Orsino is self-opinionated, driven by his own agenda. Stuart Curran describes him as a “clever and urbane, a hard-headed man of the world” (69) and an “enterprising capitalist” (69). The family is able to gain his support, “For he, alone of the characters in the play, never collapses in awe of Cenci’s power or in fear of his villainous touch” (69). He wants to wield the power that Cenci has and Curran suggests he is almost as evil as Cenci:

Orsino’s self-seeking through the entire play remains unredeemed by any nobler motives. Any power put into his hands he uses for his own purposes, and by the middle of the drama that power has increased to significant proportions. (71)

Having contemplated Cenci’s death he is ready to offer this as a solution when Beatrice seeks an answer to stopping Cenci. In fact, Orsino comes the closest to interpreting Beatrice’s veiled descriptions of the rape. He tells Giacomo that “Cenci has done an outrage to his daughter” (3.1.348) that Beatrice will not speak of:

. . . but you may  
 Conceive such half conjectures as I do,  
 From her fixed paleness, and lofty grief  
 Of her stern brow, bent on the idle air,  
 And her severe unmodulated voice,  
 Drowning both tenderness and dread; and last  
 From this; that whilst her step-mother and I,  
 Bewildered in our horror, talk together  
 With obscure hints; both self-misundertood,  
 And darkly guessing, stumbling, in our talk,  
 Over the truth, and yet to its revenge,  
 She interrupted us, and with a look  
 Which told, before she spoke it, he must die:— (3.1.349-361)

Although he does not articulate it clearly, he believes he knows what happened and is all too happy to help her plot her revenge. This is further evidence of his likeness to Cenci. Orsino sees her as an object of desire for himself, therefore can imagine the same for other men whereas this view does not occur to Giacomo. Giacomo is “well appeased” (3.1.362) that there is “a higher reason for the act” (3.1.363) than his own desire for revenge on his father. Once Beatrice and Lucretia decide that they must act, must rid their lives of Cenci, they need the assistance of a patriarch to carry out the job. They have no contacts with the outside world whereas Orsino does and he helps them find the killers. When the first attempt fails, he offers a second solution. He is not present during the murder although Savella finds a note on Marzio that is written in Orsino’s hand and implicates him in the plotting of Cenci’s murder.

Orsino appears only briefly after Cenci’s murder—in Act 5, Scene 1—when Giacomo finally realises Orsino is a villain. Nevertheless, Orsino is still able to talk his way out of Giacomo’s threat to kill him. He talks Giacomo into putting away the sword he has drawn on him before sending him into the hands of the authorities while he slips out in disguise to make his escape. Orsino plans a new life for himself, in another country with a new name. Orsino’s motivations may be different to those of Cenci but he too wants control over Beatrice.

### THE SUITORS IN *MATHILDA*

Mathilda’s first suitor is never identified yet his entrance into Mathilda’s life precipitates her father’s actions and emotions. Unlike her father, Mathilda did not view him as a suitor. In fact she says she was annoyed by the expanding of their company from father and daughter to three:

I was always happy when near my father. It was a subject of regret to me whenever we were joined by a third person, yet if I turned with a disturbed look towards my father, his eyes fixed on me and beaming with tenderness instantly restored joy to my heart. (190)

She describes the third person who joined them as a “man of rank, well informed, and agreeable in person” (191) whose “attentions” towards her became “marked and his visits more frequent” (191). Mathilda took very little notice:

I was too much taken up by my own occupations and feelings to attend much to this, and then indeed I hardly noticed more than the bare surface of events as they passed around me; but I now remember that my father was restless and uneasy whenever this person visited us and when we talked together watched us with the greatest apparent anxiety although he himself maintained a profound silence. At length these obnoxious visits suddenly ceased altogether, but from that moment I must date the change of my father: a change that to remember makes me shudder and then filled me with the deepest grief. There were no degrees which could break my fall from happiness to misery; it was as the stroke of lightning—sudden and entire. Alas! I now met frowns where before I had been welcomed only with smiles: he, my beloved father, shunned me, and either treated me with harshness or a more heart-breaking coldness. We took no more sweet counsel together; and when I tried to win him again to me, his anger, and terrible emotions that he exhibited drove me to silence and tears. (191)

The presence of a suitor thus makes Mathilda’s father understand and see his daughter as a sexual being that he wants for himself. Rather than give her hand in marriage, he drives the suitor away, but acknowledging his feelings to himself brings about a change in him that cannot be undone and thus begins the journey towards the declaration and Mathilda’s fall. The arrival of the suitor becomes the moment of the marriage exchange gone wrong—Mathilda’s father cannot bear to give her to another man.

Circumstances place poet Woodville in the role as suitor. Mathilda is of marriageable age and Woodville, who is not married, keeps calling on her, spending time with her, attempting to place himself on an intimate footing with her continually asking her, what is wrong. These are typical actions for a suitor.

Mathilda's story is written to Woodville as a letter responding to his questions about the source of her despair. Woodville comments on the fact that Mathilda never smiles and the "intense sorrow never for a moment fades from your countenance" (230) and wants to know what "dreadful calamity" (231) has befallen her.

Despite him filling this suitor function, Mathilda is ambivalent about him and these ambivalences force the reader to question her reliability as narrator. As will be shown, sometimes Woodville is in the place of a suitor and compared to her father as if she is comparing lover to lover, sometimes he is just a friend and at other times, he is an angel trying to save her—although he fails at this as well. Although unable to help restore domestic harmony in her life, Woodville contrasts with Mathilda's father. His education and attitudes are exemplary in comparison to Mathilda's father's self-indulgent ways.

Woodville is the son of a poor clergyman who has a classical education:

He was one of those very few whom fortune favours from their birth; on whom she bestows all gifts of intellect and person with profusion that knew no bounds, and whom under her peculiar protection, no imperfection, however slight, or disappointment however transitory has leave to touch. (223)

A poet with "superior excellence" (224), his "genius was transcendent" (223), and yet he is humble. His "heart was simple like a child, unstained by arrogance or vanity" (224). He does not think of himself as "superior" and "did not perceive the inferiority of others" (224). Unlike Mathilda's father he is unselfish:

He seemed incapable of conceiving of the full extent of the power that selfishness and vice possesses in the world: when I knew him, although he had suffered disappointment in his dearest hopes, he had not experienced any that arose from the meanness and self-love of men: his station was too high to allow of his suffering through their hardheartedness; and too low for him to have experienced ingratitude and encroaching selfishness: it is one of the blessings of a moderate fortune, that by preventing the possessor from

conferring pecuniary favours it prevents him also from diving into the arcana of human weakness or malice—To bestow on your fellow men is a godlike attribute—So indeed it is and as such not one fit for mortality; . . . (224)

Woodville's classical education and moderate fortune are a direct contrast to Mathilda's father's poor and indulgent education and massive fortune. Woodville is free of all evil:

and if slight examples did come across him he did not notice them but passed on his course as an angel with winged feet might glide along the earth unimpeded by all those little obstacles over which we of earthly origin stumble. (224)

Mathilda's description of Woodville's relationship with his dead fiancée Elinor, provides a comparison to Mathilda's father and mother. Elinor is somewhat like Diana—she is “generous and noble” (225), virtuous, lovely with “frank and simple” (225) manners, and “her deep blue eyes swam in a lustre which could only be given by sensibility joined to wisdom” (225). Elinor is rich and Woodville poor—the opposite of Diana and the unnamed father—with Woodville accepted as a suitor by Elinor's guardian because of his merit. The only restriction was waiting until Elinor was of age to adhere to the terms of her father's will:

She had just entered her twentieth year, and she and her lover were obliged to submit to this delay. But they were ever together and their happiness seemed that of Paradise: they studied together: formed plans of future occupations, and drinking in love and joy from each other's eyes and words they hardly repined at the delay to their entire union. Woodville for ever rose in glory; and Elinor become more lovely and wise under the lessons of her accomplished lover. (225)

They were prepared to take time over their relationship while Mathilda's father rushed Diana. Woodville and Elinor's relationship was also not secretive like that of Diana and Mathilda's father, which will be looked at in more detail in the

chapter on the father. And they were in a kind of Paradise, which compares to Mathilda's and her father's loss of this state.

Elinor and Woodville's relationship also provides an alternative view to the handling of grief. After Elinor's unexpected death, although Woodville indulged his grief (227), it was not in the extremely self-indulgent and excessive manner of Mathilda's father. Woodville initially looked away from the light but time softened his grief and "like a true child of Nature he sought in the enjoyment of her beauties for a consolation in his happiness" (227). He gave himself time to grieve and recover, whereas Mathilda's father abandoned his responsibilities and denied that he would ever recover. After Diana was dead he wandered the world rather than let grief take its course; with Mathilda he gave up completely by committing suicide.

Mathilda also compares Woodville and her father as suitor to suitor or lover to lover rather than friend to father:

He [Woodville] was younger, less worn, more passionless than my father and in no degree reminded me of him. He suffered under immediate grief yet its gentle influence instead of calling feelings otherwise dormant into action, seemed only to veil that which otherwise would have been too dazzling for me. (228)

Thus the more "passionless" Woodville is less likely to be as excessive as Mathilda's father. Woodville tries to get Mathilda to see the beauty, the good in the world, throwing into doubt all she thought was beauty and good when she was in the company of her father. Like her father, Mathilda cannot overcome her grief. She loved to listen to Woodville but felt that to hope would be to delude herself as "my father had for ever deserted me, leaving me only memories which set an eternal barrier between me and my fellow creatures" (229). Unlike Woodville,



whose grief was naturally and socially uncomplicated, Mathilda imagines herself beyond the pale:

unlawful and detestable passion had poured its poison into my ears and changed all my blood, so that it was no longer the kindly stream that supports life but a cold fountain of bitterness corrupted in its very source. It must be the excess of madness that could make me imagine that I could ever be caught but one alone; struck off from humanity; bearing no affinity to man or woman; a wretch on whom Nature had set her ban. (229)

Her experiences have set her apart from nature in much the same way that Clarintha and Beatrice describe. She says she became “unfit for any intercourse” (232) with other humans, “captious and unreasonable” (232).

Woodville tempts her nevertheless. She views him with “jealous eyes” (232), as a daughter of marriageable age might a suitor. This is the jealousy of lover rather than a friend, and when she asks him to die with her, she recalls the fate of Romeo and Juliet, even though she imagines death as uniting them with other partners—Woodville (Romeo) with Elinor (Juliet) and Mathilda (Juliet) with her unnamed father (Romeo). Woodville refuses to die with Mathilda; he has “less courage” than her (236) and implores her to hope. Woodville likens himself to Una in Spencer’s *Faerie Queen* who tries to save the Red Cross Knight (Mathilda) from being tempted by despair, another instance of gender role reversal in the novel. He tells her that they have been placed on earth with a purpose and they still have to find that and to be “virtuous” (237):

From my youth I have said, I will be virtuous; I will dedicate my life for the good of others; I will do my best to extirpate evil and if the spirit who protects ill should so influence circumstances that I should suffer through my endeavour, yet while there is hope, and hope there ever must be, of success, cheerfully do I gird myself to my task.

I have powers; my countrymen think well of them. Do you think I sow my seed in the barren air, and have no end in what I do? Believe me, I will never desert life until this last hope is torn from my bosom, that in some way my labours may form a link in

the chain of gold with which we ought all to strive to drag Happiness from where she sits enthroned above the clouds, now far beyond our reach, to inhabit the earth with us. Let us suppose that Socrates, or Shakespear, or Rousseau had been seized with despair and died in youth when they were as young as I am; do you think that we and all the world should not have lost incalculable improvement in our good feelings and our happiness through their destruction? I am not like one of these; they influenced millions: but if I can influence but a hundred, but ten, but one solitary individual, so as in any way to lead him from ill to good, that will be a joy to repay me for all my sufferings, though they were a million times multiplied; and that hope will support me to bear them. (237)

Mathilda is one person that Woodville could save from despair but he is unable to influence this “one solitary individual” (237) towards happiness and yet this is his first excuse for not suiciding with her. His second reason places him in contrast with Mathilda’s father again. He mentions that he has a mother to support whereas Mathilda’s father abandoned his responsibilities for his child and properties when Diana died. His words momentarily inspire hope in Mathilda but after he leaves Mathilda returns to despair.

Mathilda is ambivalent about Woodville. His primary role is to show that there is no possibility of recovery from an incestuous love shared by this father and daughter. Mathilda is never able to function again in society as she had before the declaration of her father’s love. She just does not know how to deal with the knowledge of that love and her own returning of that love. Woodville also contrasts with Mathilda’s father to help emphasize the excess and self-indulgence to which Mathilda’s father is prone, more of which will be revealed in the next chapter.

## CONCLUSION

The suitor(s) in *Exilius*, *The Cenci* and *Mathilda* are largely functionaries operating to illustrate the nature and characteristics of the father. An essential part

of the father-daughter incest narrative that depicts the marriage exchange gone wrong, the suitor is one of the possibilities for restoring domestic harmony as Asiaticus does in *Exilius*. As a hero of the novel he also functions as a contrast to Turpius and Valerius, demonstrating moral steadfastness and leadership skills. In contrast, Orsino and Woodville have more secondary roles in their texts, the first is a younger version of Cenci highlighting the corruption of the Roman society with the second a contrast to the father emphasizing his self-indulgent attitudes and neglect of his patriarchal duties. The political implications of the father-daughter incest in these texts will become clearer in the next chapter, which explores the figure of the father.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The most obvious reference to Jacobitism in *Exilius* occurs in the title of the novel. Kathryn King believes *Exilius* “could have proclaimed its Stuart allegiances more flagrantly only by entitling itself *The Exiled Pretender*” (*Jane Barker, Exile* 171). However, she argues that Barker’s use of the figure of the exile is not just an autobiographic impulse charting her own—as Edward Said has called it—“perilous territory of not-belonging” (51). King believes the preoccupation with exiles should be placed “within the larger context of the constructions of national and imperial identity that emerged at this time in conjunction with what Linda Colley maintains was an exclusionary, specifically Protestant brand of Britishness” (16). Drawing on Colley’s *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, King argues that because Barker was a Catholic, Jacobite, female and spinster she was a “demonized Other”, thus she belonged to four overlapping minority groups that were denied citizenship and were therefore disconnected from their society’s sources of triumph and pride. King suggests that it was from this perspective of Other, of alien, that Barker constructed herself as an author in the years following the revolution. Barker, then, wanted to bring the exiles home. In *Exilius*, the narrative, with the exception of the tale of the She-Monster, reassembles the “exile’s history into a new Whole” (Said 51). The rupture between “the self and its true home” (49) is overcome.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE FATHER

The father is the more important of the two male figures that deliver the political implications of father-daughter incest in *Exilius*, *The Cenci* and *Mathilda*. The wealthy patriarch is unquestionably head of the family and freely moves beyond his own domestic space to participate in the social and political worlds—something not always available to his wife and daughter. Part of the duty of the father, as signalled frequently in texts of the long eighteenth century including the three discussed here, is to find a suitable husband for his daughter. Whether it is the father's position or the daughter's position to choose the daughter's husband is debated in many literary texts of the time. In *Exilius*, *The Cenci* and *Mathilda*, although it is the least clear in *Mathilda*, the implication is that it is largely the father's decision. As discussed in the Introduction, Lynda Boose suggests this moment of passing his daughter on to her suitor is a stressful time for fathers. The fathers of *Exilius*, *The Cenci* and *Mathilda* do not manage this stress. Rather than hand over their daughters, their own agendas—sexual desire and torture—take precedence with incest the outcome.

This chapter will be divided into three sections—the father in his domestic and social worlds, the incest and the political and social implications of incest. The first will examine how each father is established and his role in the social and familial world. I will argue that in some senses the texts recognise that the fathers are as trapped in their social worlds as the daughters; their education and upbringings or youthful choices have set them on paths to immoral and in the case of *Cenci*, violent and depraved behaviour. Each text finds the father culpable but also looks to the social and political structures to explain the father's position. The second part will focus on the father's incestuous action, their motivations and the

outcome of their action. Despite each dying following their incestuous action—although it turns out that Turpius's is a feigned death—the fathers remain dominant throughout the second half of each text. For example, Turpius remains uppermost in Clarinthia's mind as she is haunted by her role in his death, Beatrice cannot escape her father because she has to answer for his murder and other males step into the patriarchal role he vacates, and Mathilda is focussed on her desire to be reunited with her father. The final section of this chapter will examine the political concerns of each text as presented through the two male figures, the suitor(s) and the fathers. It is through these figures that the political and social dimensions and implications of the father-daughter incest emerge. All three texts offer different social and political critiques but all show the daughters as powerless to change the course of their fathers' actions and desires. All three wealthy patriarchs are prone to indulgence—Turpius gives into his sexual desires firstly with his mistress undermining his marriage and then with his daughter; Cenci indulges his desire for power whereas Mathilda's father uses his money to indulge his every whim while neglecting his patriarchal duty. These fathers are not capable of carrying forth society. The family in these cases functions as a microcosm of larger society and the fathers' actions will only lead to the destruction of that society. I will argue that both the suitor(s) and the father contribute to Barker's central Jacobite concerns in *Exilius*, concerns about conquering and bringing the exiled king home. The male figures in *The Cenci* illuminate the worst kind of patriarchal society, one that is corrupt and immoral and in *Mathilda*, a wealthy society prone to excesses and self indulgence is revealed through an examination of Mathilda's father and his comparison to Woodville.

## THE FATHER IN HIS DOMESTIC AND SOCIAL WORLDS

This section will examine how each father is established, how he is described, in order to understand his role in the social and domestic worlds. Turpius and Cenci are both established as immoral from the outset. Although it is not specified how long Turpius has been on his immoral path the implication is that it has been a while as Valerius and Clarintha seem to be of similar ages. Cenci has been indulging his desire for power since his youth while Mathilda's father has been prone to self-indulgence and excess since childhood and this has greatly affected his interactions in the world. The fathers move freely between the domestic and social spaces. Within the domestic sphere, the fathers are head of the household, are in control and able to move as they like within the house. The fathers even go as far as invading the daughter's private bedchamber: Turpius abducts Clarintha from hers while Cenci rapes Beatrice in her bedchamber. Mathilda's father is the exception, while he approaches Mathilda's bedchamber, he pauses outside stopping himself from entering. Nevertheless, the threat is there. Within the social sphere, these fathers are failures. It is clear that as patriarchs they can move freely and have their say in the political arena; however, none of these fathers do that with aplomb. Turpius is corrupt in his social dealings committing adultery with Asbella and with Mecos's wife. The implication is that his corrupt dealings within the domestic sphere influence his abilities in the political realm. Cenci is also corrupt in his social dealings, murdering and torturing as he sees fit and paying money to the church to hush up his crimes. The fact that he is able to do this clearly shows that the society is corrupt. The Pope, the political leader, is perfectly happy to overlook corruption and murder, actions that should go against his religious and moral outlook in order to feed his greed

and want of money. Mathilda's father is not seen moving within the social sphere as clearly as the other fathers; however, his abilities are questioned through his neglect of his properties and abandonment of his daughter.

### TURPIUS

Unlike Clarinthia and Asiaticus, but like Valerius, Turpius does not get to speak for himself. The only glimpses of his own words are through Clarinthia's narrative and, as seen in the section of the daughter, she is ashamed of him because he is known in the world for "the Infamy on his Actions" (I: 24). In Part II, Book V when perhaps he could have spoken for himself, the unnamed narrator steps in. Barker, thus, has taken away a source of power from the father in the novel by partly rendering him silent. This is usual in incest novels—the daughter more frequently struggles to tell her story while the father and his justifications remain silenced. Cenci in *The Cenci* is the only father of the three featured texts whose voice is not mediated through the daughter.<sup>1</sup> This lack of voice, however, does not prevent the political and social concerns of the texts being presented through the male figures.

Not a great deal is known about Turpius other than that he is wealthy, Clarinthia is ashamed of him and he has engaged in adulterous behaviour for many years. His immorality is clear, a fact that Barker prepares the reader for in the Preface. She says:

The story of Turpius indeed is so unnatural, that if I could have alter'd or taken it away without unrav'ling the whole, I would have done it, and not have made the Daughter of so ill a Man, Wife to so great an Hero; nor would have compos'd so unprobable a Story; but that I had heard such a kind of Transaction in our times. (v)

Having heard such stories she "writ the Character to render it detestable" (v).



From Clarinthia's story, the reader gains a glimpse of a man who will stop at nothing to get what he wants. He can justify anything, turn any argument to suit his stance—as was shown with his responses to Clarinthia's theological debates. Clarinthia comes to fear him "knowing him to be a Man that would stick at nothing to satisfy his Sensuality" (I: 30). Her fears were founded because he did find a way, catapulting Clarinthia into a world of confusion, wondering how she can explain her father's actions and his death. Nothing is known of his education but he is shown to be immoral and the fact that Valerius seems to be of a similar age to Clarinthia indicates he has been that way for many years.

Turpius's power in the domestic sphere is illustrated through his dealing with Clarinthia firstly in pushing her to accept Valerius as a suitor and secondly in trying to make her accept his own sexual advances. As shown in the chapter on the daughter, Clarinthia is powerless to do anything about his behaviour or advances—he is even able to invade her private space and kidnap her from her bedchamber—as was his wife, who was unable to avert his adultery. His power is also exerted through Valerius who is following his example. Thus Turpius is shown as having the power to do as he pleases within and to his own family. But the novel shows that although the patriarch is invested with the power, there are right and wrong ways of discharging this power; Turpius is on the wrong side.

Turpius is also seen within two other domestic environments, neither his own but both of which reflect on his immoral character. The second domestic environment is Asbella's castle; the third is the home of Mecos. His mistress attempts to entrap him in her domestic space; Clarinthia tells the reader that since her mother and Turpius's wife died Asbella had tried to get Turpius to legitimise their adulterous relationship by marrying her. Within the novel, as will be seen,

his involvement and entrapment in Asbella's domestic space begins his transformation and move away from the immoral. His involvement in the third domestic space is recreated when he and Mecos meet again after he escapes Asbella's castle. Turpius had once infiltrated Mecos's home as lover to Mecos's wife. Turpius's handling of himself in his own and other domestic spaces is shown to be immoral and corrupt.

In the social world Turpius is depicted as having the power invested in every male figure, the right to speak before Senate and to engage in political aspects of life. Clarinthia is clear that as a patriarch he has more right to talk before the Senate than she and is more likely to be believed. Unlike the female characters that wander into the social space with trepidation and often in disguise, the male figures in *Exilius* are able to move freely outside the domestic space. Turpius, for example, wanders freely in search of Clarinthia whereas she is concerned at every turn about her reputation as she finds herself frequently unchaperoned. Generally, Turpius is described rather than seen in action in the novel.

#### FRANCESCO CENCI

Cenci is the main villain of *The Cenci* and a far more complex character than Turpius. His wicked nature is established almost from the opening lines of the play when Cardinal Camillo tells Cenci that the "matter of murder is hushed up" (1.1.1). The Pope "his Holiness" (1.1.2) had to be convinced to let Cenci buy his way out of the "hideous" deeds (1.1.13) that Cenci "scarce hide[s] from men's revolted eyes" (1.1.14). Thus Cenci uses a figure of the church, a Cardinal, to bargain with the Pope to pardon him from his deeds. In the social world, Cenci is answerable to the Pope; his own bastion of power is his home. There is so much

power invested in Cenci within the domestic space that he is able to pervert normal domestic affairs in such a way that his wife and children live in fear. And as shown in the section on the daughter, he guards his family from the outside world, threatening Camillo in this opening scene for simply enquiring about his family. As the family spokesperson, Cenci is also able to determine the contact that other family members have with society outside the domestic sphere. The corruption of both Cenci and the society as indicated in the opening scene is built on throughout the play.

Camillo acquaints the reader with the evil that Cenci has done since his youth, pleading with him to find a new path. Although he has stood beside him since his “dark and fiery youth / Watching its bold and bad career, as men / Watch meteors, but it vanished not;” (1.1.49-51), Camillo has long hoped that Cenci would “amend” (1.1.55) his ways. Camillo describes Cenci as “desperate and remorseless” (1.1.52) and now “in dishonoured age” (1.1.53). Cenci simply brushes his concerns aside with a threat then speaks of exulting in the tortures he inflicts:

I delight in nothing else. I love  
The sight of agony, and the sense of joy,  
When this shall be another's, and that mine.  
And I have no remorse, and little fear,  
Which are, I think, the checks of other men. (1.1.81-85)

Cenci delights in the pain of others, particularly if he's inflicted it. Camillo describes him as “Most miserable” (1.1.93) which Cenci scoffs at suggesting that instead he is “Hardened” (1.1.94). Cenci laments growing old but acknowledges that some things improve with age. As he has aged, he has swapped the “delight” (1.1.108) of murder for the more satisfying torture and “hourly pain” (1.1.117):

I the rather  
Look on such pangs as terror ill conceals;

The dry, fixed eye-ball; the pale, quivering lip,  
 Which tell me that the spirit weeps within  
 Tears bitterer than the bloody sweat of Christ.  
 I rarely kill the body, which preserves,  
 Like a strong poison, the soul within my power,  
 Wherein I feed it with the breath of fear  
 For hourly pain. (1.1.109-117)

In a few lines, Cenci has shown his character, his love of controlling other people's lives, and that he has developed his own code to live by. The church lets him pay his way out of his crimes indicating that a major institution of the society is also corrupt. Camillo ends the scene by saying that he does not believe all that Cenci has just said: "I thank my God that I believe you not" (1.1.120). He does not want to believe that his friend is as depraved as he sounds. Cenci is angry that he has had to give a third of his possessions to the church plus "make / Fourfold provision for my cursed sons" (1.1.130-131) who he has sent from Rome to Salamanca hoping that "some accident might cut them off" (1.1.133). He rapidly moves from his sons and his payment to the church to Beatrice crossing from social to domestic realms—although the two are intertwined. He orders the servant Andrea to tell Beatrice to "attend me in her chamber / This evening:—no, at midnight, and alone" (1.1.146-147). The reader becomes suspicious about his intentions. Why would a father require a midnight rendezvous with his daughter in her chamber, her only private space? This moment indicates to the reader that Cenci does not spare his family from the tortures he has just described to Camillo.

Cenci's first engagement with a group of his peers in the play is also the first time his interaction with family members is seen. This convergence of worlds comes in the liminal space of the banquet room, a space into which the public can enter as can the family but a space still housed within the domestic arena of the family. At the banquet to celebrate the death of his sons Rocco and Cristofano

Cenci welcomes his guests, suggesting that he has “too long lived like an anchorite” (1.3.4) and as such “an evil word is gone abroad of me” (1.3.6), evil words the reader knows to be true and which contrast with Beatrice’s innocence, that is her freedom from evil, her moral purity. He hopes his guests will think of him as “flesh and blood” (1.3.11) like them when they have feasted together and he has announced his good news. An outward view of Cenci is provided through the comments of various guests who call for him to share his good news describing him as too “light of heart” (1.3.14), “sprightly and companionable” (1.3.15) for all the rumours to be true.

Cenci tells them his dream, his “one desire, one hope” (1.3.26) for his sons has come true, his “disobedient and rebellious sons / Are dead” (1.3.43-44). He notes a change in the demeanour of his guests but tells them to “Rejoice with me my heart is wondrous glad” (1.3.50). There is an element of madness in this speech and a sadistic element that takes the guests by surprise. Cenci assures them that his news is real and goes on to describe his son’s deaths. Rocco was at mass when the church collapsed (1.3.58-61) and Cristofano was stabbed “in error by a jealous man” (1.3.62), all in the “self-same hour of the same night” (1.3.64). He calls for the date to be marked in the calendars as a feast day. The coincidence of the deaths seems unlikely except the reader has been given enough evidence to suspect Cenci’s involvement even though the collapse of the church is harder to imagine him being able to arrange.

The guests become confused and begin to prepare to depart giving an external view of Cenci as they do so. A third guest suggests that Cenci’s speech is all a joke even though it goes too far. He is sure it is “only raillery by his smile” (1.3.76). Cenci tries to drink a toast and speaks again: he wants to drink the wine

like a sacrament to the death of his sons—he hands around the bowl of wine but the guests abandon the feast. Camillo pleads to be allowed to “dismiss the guests” because Cenci is “insane” (1.3.92). Cenci threatens the guests: “Beware! for my revenge / Is as the sealed commission of a king, / That kills, and none dare name the murderer” (1.3.96-98). Cutting across these comments from the guests is the conversation of Beatrice where she begs for help and is ignored. He wields his power and is successful in stopping any aid being given to Beatrice and the other family members, but it is implied that the guests leave acknowledging his depravity and the strangeness of his rejoicing in the death of his sons.

His desire for control of his family and all domestic activities is clear also in his discussion with Lucretia in Act 2 when he accuses her of teaching his children to hate him. Lucretia denies his charges and he threatens to kill her if she does it again. He then accuses her of counselling Beatrice to disrupt the feast, which Lucretia again denies. He becomes angrier announcing that he is moving the family to the “savage rock, the Castle of Petrella” (2.1.168), a “safely walled, and moated” (2.1.169) castle with a dungeon and thick towers. He intends to take them away from their normal domestic sphere to an isolated castle where he can seclude them from society even more and have greater control of their lives.

Cenci’s malice towards Beatrice is shown in his speech at the end of Act 2, Scene

1. He plots a:

deed which shall confound both night and day?  
 ’Tis she shall grope through a bewildering mist  
 Of horror: if there be a sun in heaven  
 She shall not dare to look upon its beams,  
 Nor feel its warmth. Let her then wish for night;  
 The act I think shall soon extinguish all  
 For me: I bear a darker deadlier gloom  
 Than the earth’s shade, or interlunar air,  
 Or constellations quenched in murkiest cloud,  
 In which I walk secure and unbeheld

Towards my purpose.—Would that it were done! (2.1.183-193)

The “bewildering mist” (2.1.184) is exactly what Beatrice describes after the rape.

His dark intentions are clear. Most of his antagonism seems to be directed at Beatrice but clearly, he sees himself as gaining pleasure from torturing other family members. And torture as he announced in his opening scene is eminently more satisfying than murder. Just before his death, Cenci confirms how he has targeted his children:

Ay—Rocco and Cristofano my curse  
Strangled: and Giacomo, I think, will find  
Life a worse Hell than that beyond the grave:  
Beatrice shall, if there be skill in hate,  
Die in despair, blaspheming: to Bernardo,  
He is so innocent, I will bequeath  
The memory of these deeds, and make his youth  
The sepulchre of hope, where evil thoughts  
Shall grow like weeds on a neglected tomb.  
When all is done, out in the wide Campagna  
I will pile up my silver and my gold;  
My costly robes, paintings, and tapestries;  
My parchments and all records of my wealth;  
And make a bonfire in my joy, and leave  
Of my possessions nothing but my name;  
Which shall be an inheritance to strip  
Its wearer bare as infamy. (4.1.46-62)

Thus Cenci describes his crimes to his family, underscoring his own depravity and indulgences. Cenci is particularly angry that his older daughter has escaped his torture, celebrates the deaths of Cristofano and Rocco and has worked to make Giacomo’s life hell by making him penniless. Bernardo is the least targeted but not immune as Beatrice says he has chained up Bernardo (2.1.70-71). Cenci wants to leave Bernardo haunted by desperate memories deprived of his material inheritance:

That done,  
My soul, which is the scourge, will I resign  
Into the hands of him who wielded it;  
Be it for its own punishment or theirs,

He will not ask it of me till the lash  
 Be broken in its last and deepest wound;  
 Until its hate be all inflicted. Yet,  
 Lest death outspeed my purpose, let me make  
 Short work and sure— (4.1.62-80)

At this odd moment in the play he suggests that his power comes from God. He must have been “favoured from above / For when I cursed my sons, they died” (4.1.39-40); “more depends on God than me” (4.1.43). Later in the scene when he says: “He does his will, I mine!” (4.1.139), he seems to suggest that he is equal to God or that at least he has will equal to God. Then the issue is confused again with:

I do not feel as if I were a man,  
 But like a fiend appointed to chastise  
 The offences of some unremembered world. (4.1.160-162)

So here he is no longer a man, nor an equal of God but a “fiend” (4.1.161) and his crimes have been a type of chastisement for offences in an “unremembered world” (4.1.162). Cenci is excited by his thoughts, his “heart is beating with an expectation / Of horrid joy” (4.1.166-167). Clearly Cenci is deluded in his thinking; his love of murder and torture have affected the way he thinks. His love of the immoral and murder has corrupted him and his sense of self. There is a contradiction: he wants to be his own agent but then suggests he is an instrument of someone else’s will. In the first part of the play then Cenci is shown to wield all the power and to be able to do so even though he transgresses many of society’s rules. He is depraved, enjoying inflicting torture and slow death on his victims rather than allowing them to die quickly and most of the time he is confident in his ploys although is unhappy with the church’s demands for him to pay for his crimes to be hushed up. His abuses are clearly shown to exist in the domestic sphere as well as in greater society.



**MATHILDA'S FATHER**

Mathilda's father, who remains unnamed throughout the text, is introduced on the second page of the novel. Like Turpius, his voice is mediated through Mathilda. His letters provide the only direct access to him but only one of these—his suicide letter—seems to be offered in full. The fact that Mathilda fails to name her father could be an attempt to regain and exercise some power in her life when she believes—certainly at times—that he has taken much from her. Mathilda describes her father as a “man of rank” (176), who “lost his father early, and was educated by a weak mother with all the indulgence she thought due to a nobleman of wealth” (176). More is known about his background and education than either Turpius or Cenci, and these details are important for understanding the social critique made through the novel. Mathilda's father attended Eton and then university and from childhood had the “free use of large sums of money” (176) giving him independence and an ability to have what he wanted. This meant:

his character became strongly and early marked and exhibited a various surface on which a quick sighted observer might see the seeds of virtues and of misfortunes. His careless extravagance, which made him squander immense sums of money to satisfy passing whims, which from their apparent energy he dignified with the name of passions, often displayed itself in unbounded generosity. Yet while he earnestly occupied himself about the wants of others his own desires were gratified to their fullest extent. He gave his money, but none of his own wishes were sacrificed to his gifts; he gave his time, which he did not value, and his affections which he was happy in any manner to have called into action. (176-177)

He satisfied his every whim and passion but his friendships seemed to be based on what he could do for his friends with his money. At college, he discarded books believing there were other lessons to learn. “By a strange narrowness of ideas he viewed all the world in connexion only as it was or was not related to his little society” (177). This is so different to Woodville who held his place in society by

his merit, not because of wealth or rank. Despite this immersion in his world, Mathilda's father kept secrets from those closest to him. He was in love but "feared that the intensity of his passion" (178) might be ridiculed by his friends. He is sensitive to the opinions of others. Mathilda portrays her father as selfish, passionate, secretive and because of his wealth as having nothing to rein in his passions.

Mathilda's father is presented within two domestic spaces and relationships. In fact most of his dealings are presented as one-on-one and even when there is a third such as the "young man of rank" (191), he is not clearly drawn. The first domestic relationship is with Diana, the second with Mathilda. In both Mathilda's father is in control. It is implied that he has social skill enough to introduce Mathilda to London society but having seen him make his way in the world because of his rank and wealth the reader is aware it is not solely because of his social prowess. However, Mathilda's father's political abilities are questioned in his neglect of his properties and abandonment of his daughter. The relationships with Diana and Mathilda both have an obsessive and selfish edge. He is primarily focused on his own happiness and life. In each, he demands all their time and remains forever in their company.

Diana had a positive effect on Mathilda's father although Mathilda is critical of the fact that they kept their relationship a secret and "seldom admitted a third to their society" (180). Such intensity between two people is repeated in Mathilda's relationship with her father. And as soon as Diana dies within a few days after giving birth to Mathilda, Mathilda's father abandons Mathilda in order to indulge his grief without impediment or distraction. He disappears, writing only

to give Mathilda's aunt instructions about his daughter and to say that he would not return:

When I leave this place do not expect to hear from me: I must break all ties that at present exist. I shall become a wanderer, a miserable outcast—alone! alone! (180)

This is what later happens to Mathilda. The letter asks his sister to look after Mathilda, to take care of her and “cherish her” (181). He describes her as “that unhappy little being whom I could not see, and hardly dare mention” (180). In some ways, this is how she will always be. His behaviour is portrayed as utterly selfish—“He existed from this moment for himself only” (181). He returns when it suits him, when Mathilda is sixteen, but again embraces a relationship with obsessiveness. Although Mathilda describes his return as changing her world “from dull uniformity to the brightest scene of joy and delight” (187), she also comments that they “were forever together; and the subjects of our conversations were inexhaustible” (187). This is so like the relationship of Diana and Mathilda's father that it casts Mathilda as substitute wife. In fact Mathilda says he told her he was “very little changed” (187) from what he was:

before his misfortunes. It is intercourse with civilized society; it is the disappointment of cherished hopes, the falsehood of friends, or the perpetual clash of mean passions that change the heart and damps the ardour of youthful feelings; lonely wanderings in a wild country among people of simple or savage manners may inure the body but will not tame the soul, or extinguish the ardour and freshness of feeling incident to youth. (188)

Her father remained unchanged because he did not associate with other people from “civilized society” (188). In some ways, he extracted himself from human society, creating his own moral creed:

He had seen so many customs and witnessed so great a variety of moral creeds that he had been obliged to form an independant one for himself which had no relation to the peculiar notions of any one country: his early prejudices of course influenced his judgement in

the formation of his principles, and some raw college ideas were strangely mingled with the deepest deductions of his penetrating mind. (188)

His poor education and early life dominate his thinking as they will when he returns.

Mathilda's father tells her his time out of England was like a dream—it was as if he suspended his life and that “all his affections belonged to events which had happened and persons who existed sixteen years before” (188). He talks of Mathilda's mother as though she lived “only a few weeks before” (188): “In all this there was a strangeness that attracted and enchanted me. He was, as it were, now awakened from his long, visionary sleep” (188), and on “awakening I was all that he had to love on earth” (188). Mathilda's father, as Mathilda presents him, is focused on himself. He indulged his grief at Diana's death by running away not as Woodville does upon the death of Elinor in a natural way that will eventually allow healing. He is a wealthy patriarch who neglects all his responsibility and becomes self-indulgent and obsessive in relationships.

All three fathers—Turpius, Francesco Cenci and Mathilda's father are shown to be trapped in their outlooks. All have been indulging their wants since they were children or young men; breaking that pattern is shown to be difficult. Turpius is the only one shown to have room for reform. That reform comes at a price—he is deformed by the poisoned drink Asbella gives to him—but this reformation is necessary for the appropriate political outcome of the novel.

## THE INCEST

In each text, the father's motivation for incest is different. Turpius has two incestuous impulses—the first is to marry Clarinthia to her brother, the second is to satisfy his own sexual appetite. For Cenci, the penis is a dagger plunged into

the body of a rebellious daughter. Mathilda's father initially tries to suppress his desire for his daughter eventually declaring his desire rather than initiating a sexual encounter, although a sexual threat is later implied. The focus of this section is a response of the father to his incestuous action. Each dominates their daughter's life despite their death—feigned in the case of Turpius. When Turpius finally reappears alive, he begins to show some remorse and to change his attitude towards his behaviour. Cenci shows no remorse following his rape of Beatrice, he is unchanging emphasising his depravity. Mathilda's father flees after his declaration of incestuous desire, the guilt of his declaration driving him to suicide. Like Turpius he is remorseful, hoping Mathilda is young enough to survive the experience.

### TURPIUS

Following the attempted rape, Turpius is presumed dead until the narrator “conducts” (II: 97) the “reader to search after the Body of *Turpius*, which has been so long time lost and lamented by his Daughter the beautiful *Clarinthia*” (II: 97). Although Clarintha and Asiaticus believed him to be dead, Turpius's servant was able to “restore him to Life” (II: 98). Turpius then commanded him to keep his survival a secret and “feign an Interment” (II: 98) until he could find Clarintha and his would-be murderer. He heads to Sicily where his servant tells him Clarintha has gone. He vows to see Valerius and Clarintha married, putting them in “Possession of his Lordships in *Italy*” (II: 99) so that he could spend the rest of his days with Asbella in Sicily. When he arrives, Clarintha has escaped and he begins to mistrust Asbella and Valerius deciding to go to Rome and “take Measures contrary to what he had design'd before” (II: 99). Asbella now wary of

Turpius, confines him within her castle, which enrages him and confirms his fear that Asbella and Valerius have been cruel to Clarintha:

But then again, in his Anger and Despair, he would say to himself, I ought not to impute this Crime to them; it is my Self, Horror of Nature as I am; it is I that am the Author of her Loss, miserable abominable Monster! a Burthen to the Earth, unworthy of Heaven, and afraid of Hell. (II: 99)

A change is coming over Turpius. He is suspicious of his former lover and begins to feel anguish over his own behaviour. He labels himself a “Horror of Nature” (II: 99), an “abominable Monster” (II: 99). This is not unlike the terms that Clarintha had used to describe herself after the attempted rape. Turpius ponders Clarintha and all his crimes:

*O Clarintha, Clarintha, beautiful Clarintha!* the perfect Pourtrait of thy bright and vertuous Mother, thy Loss is irreparable, and thy untimely Death a Misery insupportable. O Wretch that I was! to give my self to the Embraces of a Prostitute, and broke my Marriage-Vows to the best and fairest of her Sex, and then projected an incestuous Marriage betwixt my only lawful Offspring and the Son of my Lewdness; and, as if these had been but petty Crimes, attempted the most detestable in Nature on the Chastity of my own Child, that now I am justly the Object of Heaven’s Vengeance, and a Prey to this lewd Woman’s Tyranny. I am without Power or Friend to help or to deliver me; I have nothing but Horror and Lamentation to accompany me, and inward Regret to torment me. (II: 99-100)

Here Turpius compares Clarintha to her mother. She is the “perfect Pourtrait” (II: 99) of her mother. This partly explains Turpius’s sexual desire for Clarintha. He laments the crimes he committed against her mother although nothing compares to the “detestable” (II: 100) crime he attempted on the “chastity” (II: 100) of his “own Child” (II: 100). Part of the blame, he decides belongs to another woman, Asbella. He fell “Prey to this lewd Woman’s Tyranny” (II: 100). Now that unnatural female tyrant is bargaining his freedom for her son’s inheritance,

“which at last so provok’d him, that with Difficulty he restrain’d himself from doing her Violence” (II: 100)—but not before he cursed her.

Asbella—who is portrayed as just one step removed from the Wife of the Sea-Monster who is permanently rejected from society—momentarily pretends to soften and show compassion for his suffering. Soon the narrator is describing her as having a “hypocritical Complaisance” (II: 101) and she shows her bitterness:

Did I not waste my Youth in your Love, and prostitute mine Honour to your Embraces? Was I not always faithful and constant to you, a true Friend and Confident of all your most Secret Thoughts? And above all, though a Lady born to great Riches, yet as subject and obedient to all your Desires and Commands, as if I had been dependent on your Bounty. It is very hard, that I shou’d now be the Object of your Anger, for no other Cause but endeavouring to make you happy, by keeping you within the Reach of my Embrace. Had Queen *Dido* done so by her *Trojan* Hero, Despair and Death had not been her only Refuge. (II: 101)

She offers him “cordial” (II: 102) to “moderate” (II: 102) his fury and enable him to sleep. He begins to drink but changes his mind and throws the contents of the cup, which turn out to be poison, into her face. They escape death but are both disfigured:

*Asbella* became deaf and blind, and lost all her Teeth; *Turpius* lost his Teeth, Hair, and Nails. Thus just Heaven takes Care to punish human Crimes, and teach us our Duty by our Sufferings. *Asbella*’s Eyes, that gave Way to loose Glances and alluring Looks, are now only Blindness and Deformity; and her Ears, that were open to the soft Whispers of unlawful Love, are now shut from all Conversation, and debarr’d of the Employment for which they were created. And *Turpius*, whose handsome Person and graceful Mein had deluded not only *Asbella*, but divers others, was now a miserable Spectacle of Deformity. (II: 102-103)

*Asbella* is punished the most, underscoring the importance of a woman’s virtuousness and reflecting on *Clarinthia*’s nature. *Valerius* nurses them but keeps *Turpius* locked up in the same place he and *Asbella* had confined *Clarinthia*. *Turpius*’s heart is “oppress’d with Sorrow, and his Head with Madness and

Despair” (II: 103). Eventually he escapes by jumping from the balcony into the sea when he sees a ship whose master turns out to be his ancient enemy Mecos. Turpius begs Mecos to “sheath his Sword in his Heart” (II: 104). Mecos tells how Turpius was one of his wife’s lovers and having begged his wife not to see Turpius, he killed her when he found Turpius in his bed with her. Mecos refuses to be Turpius’s executioner, instead offering to take him wherever he wants to go. They both head for the House of Publius Scipio.

When they arrive Turpius is reunited with Clarinthia:

though he was extremely chang’d, she knew him; and, falling at his Feet, begg’d him to pardon her if she had done any thing to offend him. Rise, rise, my dear Child, said *Turpius*, for it is I, thy guilty Father, which ought to be in that Posture, begging Pardon of the Gods, and all the World, and in particular of thee, my dear *Clarinthia*: Thou hast done nothing to displease me, thou hast been all Vertue and Obedience, thy bright Soul is all Perfection and Purity; then pity and pardon this thy unhappy Father: Then both embracing, testify’d their mutual Tenderness in a Shower of Tears, ’till *Publius*, *Asiaticus*, and others of the Company, interrupted them, with their Welcomes and kind Addresses to *Turpius*. (II: 105)

Turpius, who now outwardly looks like the monster that his behaviour previously showed him to be, thus seeks pardon from his daughter. He finally recognises her as being all “Vertue and Obedience” (II: 105), a “bright Soul” (II: 105) of “Perfection and Purity” (II: 105). All is resolved in a “Shower of Tears” (II: 105). This moment gives modern readers pause. How can the vile and violent act of attempted rape be so easily forgiven? This is not for example the psychological realism of domestic fiction; this would not be asked of the readers of a Jane Austen novel. Instead this ending is part of the novel’s looking back, to the romance in which such resolutions were possible. Barker suggests in her Preface that the romance form also helps her put forward moral ideas in a time when “loose Gallantry” and “Deluge of Libertinism” have “overflow’d the Age”



(i)<sup>2</sup>—hence laying the groundwork for this to be read as pious and didactic.

Barker argues that she wants to show that a marriage based on virtue and honour is more likely to survive than one based on “Indifferency” (ii) arguing that the romance can help young readers “distinguish between real Worth and Superficial Appearances” (ii). Thus, she is dealing with issues of the time using an older form that will help teach her readers. The lessons of *Exilius*, she suggests, should help her readers discern “that it is not a laced Coat, or large Wig, that makes a Caesar or Scipio; nor all the Utensils of the Toilet, can make a compleat Heroine, but true Virtue and Humour” (ii). It is possible that the “Utensils of the Toilet” (ii) is a reference to Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*, which was published with great success in 1712. If so, it would suggest that Barker finished *Exilius*, or at least wrote the Preface, closer to publication than previously thought.

As well as “Love Lectures” (iii) the young reader “may also reap many Handfulls of good Morality” (iii) and make acquaintance with Ancient Poets. “In short, I think I may say of Romances as Mr. Herbert says of Poetry, that a pleasant Story, may find him, who flies a serious Lecture” (iii). The title page also supports the comments in the Preface, suggesting the novel was “written after the manner of Telemachus, for the instruction of some Young Ladies of Quality.” The *Adventures of Telemaque*, a work written by François de Salginac Fénelon, the archbishop of Cambrai, in 1699, was popular in France and England. James R. Foster in *History of the Pre-Romantic Novel in England*, says:

Readers were charmed by the moral teachings of *Telemachus*, its picture of the simple life led by the noble inhabitants of Betique, and approved the author’s finding in tears a sign of the goodness of nature and his preaching of the gospel of benevolence. Some one judged him to be a deist, but they were mistaken, for Fenelon still clung to dogma. Every one seemed to admire Telemachus’s spiritual guide, Mentor, although to the modern reader he appears

to be arbitrary, self-righteous, “preachy,” and more likely to be too inquisitive than over-scrupulous. (59-60, note 6)

For William H. McBurney the number of English editions of *Telemachus*—at least seven by 1715—showed “the possibilities of romance as an educational vehicle, had revived to some extent the popularity of that waning literary form” (388).<sup>3</sup>

Eleanor Wikborg argues that the romance form allowed Barker to:

displace the action from polite society just enough to explore forbidden feelings, at the same time as its ideal aspirations lent themselves naturally to the irreproachable moral of the didactic form. (“The Expression of the Forbidden in Romance Form” 3)

By “hovering between the two genres of romance escape and didactic realism” (3), Barker can “express forbidden feelings” (3) but still remain “morally respectable” (3). Wikborg believes Barker tries “to influence the real by evoking the ideal” (4). “Barker’s love stories make it clear that this ideal includes not only ‘Virtuous Affection’ but also sexual fulfilment” (4).

There is one crucial difference between the romance plot and that of realistic didactic fiction which Barker has chosen to avail herself of: that is, where the didactic form punishes the expression of the illicit, the romance plot offers the possibility of rewarding it. (6)

For example, events such as abduction “which in realistic fiction would either threaten to bring about ruin, in *Exilius* provide deliverance from oppression and are thus given the happy turn of a comic plot” (7). Thus, Wikborg is arguing that the romance contains elements of fantasy not allowable in fiction that more closely reflects life. However, Barker is not trying to hide the incest. In the Preface, she mentions it as a reality of her own time and she labels the incest, although not the father-daughter incest. Barker is not alone in employing the term, other writers of her era also do this. For example, in Delarivier Manley’s

1709 *The New Atalantis* Lady Volpone declares incest upon finding her husband Hernando declaring love to his ward Louisa (126). In Eliza Haywood's 1724 novel, *The Fatal Secret: Or, Constancy in Distress*, Anadea just seduced by her father-in-law calls out "Adultery!--Incest!--Damnation" (251). Moll Flanders also applies the term to her situation when she finds that she has married her brother (137). This is in contrast to twentieth-century incest texts, which expect the reader to apply the term from outside the text. This naming of the incest is hardly displacing the theme as Wikborg suggests, especially since the incest narrative also structures the novel.

In *The Lover as Father Figure in Eighteenth-Century Women's Fiction*, Wikborg also suggests that the incest demonstrates "the father's power to reify, to objectify his daughter, and her dramatization of the fear of the violation by an implacable father looks forward to the Gothic" (23). It also allows Clarinthia "to gratify the female desire for revenge" (23):

In this respect Barker anticipates Ann Radcliffe, who several generations later sees to it that all her wicked father figures suffer nasty deaths at the end of her novels. But in Barker's plot, Turpius's death takes place much earlier, and by effecting an immediate punishment of his attempt at rape, it provides the pleasure of instant retaliation. (23)

I would argue that there is no pleasure indicated in the novel at the death of Turpius. Clarinthia experiences momentary relief at being saved from rape but is mortified at the discovery that her abductor is her father. Later she battles with her own feelings for Asiaticus who she believes is her father's killer. Thus she is ambivalent about her father's death, not rejoicing. In fact, his death threatens her future. Also the death does not last, Turpius is not actually dead, so the nasty deaths of the later Gothic novels have not occurred in *Exilius*. While *Exilius* has

other Gothic features, particularly settings and the style of adventure, its happy ending is a departure from the later genre.

Jane Spencer, however, suggests that the romance is not just a form but “the name for a certain attitude to women, embodied in a good deal of the feminocentric fiction” (“Women writers and the eighteenth-century novel” 213-214) of the period. In the early years of the century when Barker was writing there were struggles between the “moral” and “immoral” (215) groups of writers, between narratorial style and form but Spencer says, whatever their stance, women writers were trying to capture women’s concerns and desires; women’s stories became central in their narratives. She suggests that early in the century women were free to experiment, hence the blending of romantic and realistic elements that left the end product somewhere between romance and novel—exactly where *Exilius* can be found. However, Spencer argues, this had changed by the end of the century when women were “arguably constrained by the generic expectations that built up for the feminine sentimental novel” (215):

Without collapsing the differences between novelists, I would like to suggest that the female novelists of the eighteenth century shared certain concerns: with the ideas of romance as a way of approaching historical truth; with women’s relationships, as family members and by extension as authors, to the patrilineal inheritance patterns of their society; and with the creation and examination of a female public role. Through their dealings with these questions they established the novel, by the end of the century, as a feminized part of the new public sphere, in which discussions of politics and private life could meet. (233)

Barker uses the romance to write the “feminized part of the new public sphere” foreshadowing the domestic novel.

Just as Barker claims to be using incest in this text because she had heard of such “transaction[s]” in her time—thus in Spencer’s terms it is an “historical truth”—Clarinthia’s story also deals with the issue of inheritance that Spencer

discusses. Turpius's original suggestion that Clarinthia marry Valerius is about securing the family wealth for the bastard son. It may represent an "historical truth" that fathers chose husbands for their daughters not to make the daughter happy but for a variety of other reasons that secure the family's political and financial future. Barker, as Spencer suggests, uses the romance form to talk about women's place in the world, about their education, their marriages and allegiances. Themes surrounding the position and place of women run through most the tales in Barker's novel; even in the more outlandish tales such as that of She-Monster, a woman who disobeyed her father, by giving in to her sexual desires, was exiled and ended up a fish's wife. She is the only character in the novel who cannot successfully be returned from exile, she pays the ultimate price of straying too far from a life of "virtue."

This blending of the romance with realistic elements or "historical truths," that Spencer discusses, then, looks back to the romance but forward to the domestic novel that is emerging at this time. *Exilius* is on the cusp of that development. One of the most notable aspects of romance that comes through in the text is the successful conclusion of all adventures with all loose ends tied off. Such an ending suits Barker's political purpose. The changes in Turpius, his regrets, are clearly depicted. Such sentiment on the father's part is rarely seen even in modern incest literature. While the attempted rape must be forgiven for Clarinthia to be able to marry her hero Asiaticus—she cannot marry the man who she believes murdered her father to whom she owes her obedience. This is hard for the reader to accept. As will be seen later for the Jacobite reader, this forgiveness signalled the possibility of the return of the exiled king.

## FRANCESCO CENCI

Although the rape occurs between Acts 2 and 3, Cenci does not appear throughout Act 3. He has dominated the first two Acts of the play then disappears from sight as Beatrice struggles to articulate the incest. Despite his lack of physical presence, Lucretia, who believes Cenci has attacked Beatrice in a way that has sent her spiralling towards madness, mentions him constantly. Just as Cenci dominated the opening Acts, Beatrice will now come to dominate the middle and final acts but despite her dominance, Cenci never disappears entirely from the play. Instead, as will be shown, he is replaced by other patriarchal figures. This lack of appearances in Act 3 means that there is no direct response to his incestuous action and when he does appear again at the opening of Act 4, little about him has changed. Again, he is preparing to penalise Beatrice, this time for being late to his summons. He may have raped her but his torture of her is far from over. In fact, there is every indication that rape may occur again. He remembers that they are at Petrella, a place removed from the “eyes and ears of Rome” (4.1.5) which means that he might:

drag her by the golden hair?  
Stamp on her? Keep her sleepless till her brain  
Be overworn? Tame her with chains and famine?  
Less would suffice. Yet so to leave undone  
What I most seek! No, 'tis her stubborn will  
Which, by its own consent, shall stoop as low  
As that which drags it down. (4.1.6-12)

He seems to become fixated on assaulting his daughter: “For Beatrice, worse terrors are in store, / To bend her to my will” (4.1.75-76). But by now she is refusing to do his bidding. He continues to curse her through an address to God delivered while kneeling as though in prayer. He calls her a “specious mass of flesh” (4.1.115), “my bane and my disease” (4.1.118) and a “devil, / Which

sprung from me as from hell” (4.1.119-120). He does not want the “virtues” (4.1.124) to blossom in her. He wants God to “reverse that doom!” (4.1.127). He wants to poison her and deform her, to parch her “love-enkindled lips” (4.1.133) and to “warp those fine limbs / To loathed lameness!” (4.1.133-134). Finally he comes back to her eyes: “All-beholding sun, / Strike in thine envy those life-darting eyes / With thine own blinding beams” (4.1.134-136). He wants to be free of her “blinding beams.” He cannot bear her gaze. This is the closest sign to Cenci feeling guilt; he cannot bear the look in Beatrice’s eyes.

Lucretia begs him to “unsay those dreadful words” (4.1.137) but jumping up he throws his hands towards heaven and begins to talk about Beatrice having his child—the most overt reference to the rape in the play—cursing her motherhood:

May it be  
A hideous likeness of herself; that, as  
From a distorting mirror, she may see  
Her image mixed with what she most abhors. (4.1.145-149)

Cenci wants her child to be a mixture of herself and him, the one she “most abhors.” He wants her to see herself resembled in the child but not in its character. He calls for the child to be “wicked and deformed, / Turning her mother’s love to misery” (4.1.151-152), to hunt her “to a dishonored grave” (4.1.157) and, “repay her care and pain with hate / Or what may else be more unnatural” (4.1.154-155). Cenci’s admission strengthens the notion of Beatrice’s powerlessness to openly speak of incest. She is unable to name or describe the act—yet here in a more succinct way Cenci describes it even if he does not name it. He can own this action—although the admission is only made within the domestic sphere and to someone—Lucretia—who also cannot tell.

Cenci's final lines of the play are delivered as a drug-induced sleep overcomes him: "It must be late; mine eyes grow dim / With unaccustomed heaviness of sleep" (4.1.175-176). Readers do not know it yet but Lucretia has given him a sleeping draught to make him easier to murder. Cenci talks of sleep as the "healing dew of Heaven" (4.1.178). He thinks to sleep a while:

and then—  
O, multitudinous Hell, the fiends will shake  
Thine arches with the laughter of their joy!  
There shall be lamentation heard in Heaven  
As o'er an angel fallen; and upon Earth  
All good shall droop and sicken, and ill things  
Shall, with a spirit of unnatural life,  
Stir and be quickened; even as I am now. (4.1.182-189)

He contemplates joy in Heaven at his plans for Beatrice. Cenci has been portrayed as unchanging evil, constantly indulging his love of torture. He shows no sign of changing after he has raped Beatrice. Curran suggests that Cenci is a devil figure and Beatrice an angel arguing that:

The incestuous act is both profoundly sexual and profoundly metaphysical: if Beatrice is not to become like Lucifer, the instrument of evil for a cruel God—and Cenci throughout the fourth act voices this purpose—then she must commit murder. The intense bombardment of the imagery in the third and fourth acts emphasizes the truth of Beatrice's assertion at the trial that she has not committed parricide: her crime is deicide. (138).

Thus Curran argues that Beatrice's crime is the slaying of a God. He suggests that Beatrice does not murder her father out of revenge because he raped her body but out of "imperative self-defense" (139) and because "he ravaged her spirit . . . turning her 'good into evil'" (139).

The Cenci legend posed for [Percy] Shelley a physical situation—perhaps the only possible one—in which good was not merely made to suffer from evil, but was subjected to it so completely that *it literally embodied evil*. Beatrice is thus faced with an ethical dilemma admitting of no solution consonant with her conception of good. To become, like Lucifer, the instrument of evil is the greatest of all possible sins against her Catholic God; to



commit suicide is an act of mortal sin for which the Church allows no exception; only by killing her father in line with the principles of divine justice can Beatrice hope for absolution from the evil into which her father has plunged her. (139-140)

And Curran argues: “the universe does not respond to her conception of it” (140).

Instead the death of Cenci creates “further evil” (140). Death seems the only solution but may not bring relief.

For, at best the after-life she conceives at the play’s end will be a void; at its worst, it will be a Hell in which the evil God who rules the universe will at last and eternally commit Beatrice to Luciferian violation. (140)

I would argue that although she has second thoughts that her own death may plunge her back into the same realm of her father where he can “wind me in his hellish arms and fix / His eyes on mine, and drag me down, down, down” (5.4.66-67), she sees it as “a reward of innocent lies” (5.4.110). Cenci never wavers in his intention and desires to punish others but particularly Beatrice. There is no sign in the play that Count Cenci could reform.

#### **MATHILDA’S FATHER**

After his declaration, Mathilda’s father sends her a letter. Although he has ruptured their relationship by casting her in the role of lover, the letter is addressed to “My Dear Child.” This address pushes her firmly from that lover position she has been occupying to that of daughter again. She frequently hovers between the position of daughter and that of lover indicating his constantly shifting attitude towards her and the fight within himself over his love.

The letter begins with his sadness at having polluted Mathilda’s mind and made her “innocent heart acquainted with the looks and language of unlawful and monstrous passion” (207). He takes the blame, and announces that they must separate. Of the three fathers, Mathilda’s is the only one who fights his incestuous

inclination. Again Mathilda's father chooses to think of her as his daughter but muddies the perception by talking about himself as her "only friend" (207), who (contradictorily) has cast her out "shelterless on the world" (207). He acknowledges that he has blasted her hopes and destroyed her "peace and security" (207). He says: "memory will bring to you frightful images of guilt, and anguish of innocent love betrayed" (207).

He asks for forgiveness for having stolen her "loveliness to place in its stead the foul deformity of sin" (207). He does not want pity but her pardon or forgiveness. He entreats her to remember the happy moments in Scotland and reminds her that he loved her before he returned to her life:

It is a strange link in my fate that having seen you I should passionately love you. During my wanderings I never slept without first calling down gentle dreams on your head. If I saw a lovely woman, I thought, does my Mathilda resemble her? All delightful things, sublime scenery, soft breezes, exquisite music seemed to me associated with you and only through you to be pleasant to me. (208)

Here again she is woman rather than daughter, and he was as obsessed with her before his return as she was with him. When he returns, Mathilda is a daughter of marriageable age, a sexual being. In texts such as the three examined in this thesis, it becomes clear that fathers must recognise their daughters as sexual beings in order to think about their marrying but there is a chance at this decision time that the father will come to desire his daughter. In some ways, Mathilda was a dream, a figure of her father's imagination that he brought with him to apply to the flesh and blood Mathilda. When he was finally reunited with her, he saw her "beauty, artlessness and untaught wisdom" (208), all of which "seemed to belong to a higher order of beings" (208).

In the letter he ponders the delights he found in her. He had placed her on a pedestal, much in the same way that she idolized him. He reminds her of their time in London when “still I only felt the peace of sinless passion” (209) and “desired no more than to gaze on your countenance, and to know that I was all the world to you; I was lapped in a fool’s paradise of enjoyment and security” (209).

At first he did not realise the dangers creeping into their relationship:

if I enjoyed from your looks, and words, and most innocent caresses a rapture usually excluded from the feelings of a parent towards his child, yet no uneasiness, no wish, no casual idea awoke me to a sense of guilt. I loved you as a human father might be supposed to love a daughter borne to him by a heavenly mother . . . Perhaps also my passion was lulled to content by the deep and exclusive affection you felt for me. (209)

The moment of revelation came with the entrance of a possible marriage partner, the suitor:

when I saw you become the object of another’s love; when I imagined that you might be loved otherwise than as a sacred type and image of loveliness and excellence; or that you might love another with more ardent affection than that which you bore to me, then the fiend awoke within me; I dismissed your lover; and from that moment I have known no peace. I have sought in vain for sleep and rest; my lids refuse to close, and my blood was for ever in a tumult. I awoke to a new life as one who dies in hope might wake in Hell. I will not sully your imagination by recounting my combats, my self-anger, and my despair. Let a veil be drawn over the unimaginable sensations of a guilty father; the secrets of so agonized a heart may not be vulgar. (209)

A number of issues are raised in this passage. Firstly, it is clear that Mathilda’s father worships her and believes that only “a sacred” (209) love will suit her. Secondly, he cannot bear the thought that she might love someone other than him. Thirdly, he dismissed the suitor without Mathilda’s knowledge. And, fourthly, he has had no peace since he realised the depth and type of his attraction to Mathilda. He is sexually frustrated and combating guilt, hence his outward despair. Having seen her “bitter and sympathizing sorrow” (209) he set about trying to conquer his

passion. He admits taking her to the family estate to reawaken his grief at the loss of Diana, so that “all love for her child would become extinct” (209). But it did not work:

I have been miserably mistaken in imagining that I could conquer my love for you; I never can. The sight of this house, these fields and woods which my first love inhabited seems to have encreased it: in my madness I dared say to myself—Diana died to give her birth; her mother’s spirit was transferred into her frame, and she ought to be as Diana to me. With every effort to cast it off, this love clings closer, this guilty love more unnatural than hate, that withers your hopes and destroys me for ever. (210-211)

The move into the family home simply reinforced Mathilda’s likeness to her mother and his love for Mathilda increased. His love is confused—is it Mathilda he loves or is it that he loves the person who reminds him of Diana? Whatever the case, her daughterly status is replaced as potential bride/lover and hence his labelling of his love as “unnatural” (210) and “guilty” (210).

The letter confirms that he was at her door—the moment she feared a sexual advance from him—but all was silent and he hopes that she has slept and will be protected from the “agonies of passion” (210). The sexual possibilities are thus reinforced. Finally, he will depart just as he did after her birth and does not want her to follow. He wants her to forget him and the “evil” (211) he taught her, and to cast off her “grief” (211), the only “gift” (211) he “bestowed” (211) on her. His greatest hope is that he has not destroyed her, that she is young enough to overcome any grief.

The letter ends with his farewell. He leaves with the belief that he has her “pardon” (211), thanking her for forgiving him because he cannot believe she would not: “beloved one, I accept your pardon with a gratitude that will never die, and that will, indeed it will, outlive guilt and remorse” (211).

Thus Mathilda's father tells of his experience of reuniting with Mathilda and the difficulties he experienced once he realised that he loved her more than a daughter. As already seen in the daughter section, Mathilda follows him believing he intends to kill himself and her prophecy proves correct. In many ways Mathilda's father controls her life once he re-enters it. The narrative focuses around his love, the grief it brings him and the discovery and explanation of his grief is the central mystery. Once he is dead, the narrative is of Mathilda's response to his declaration, her fall and her longing to be reunited with him.

The incest in all three texts precipitates the death or seeming death of the fathers, yet all three fathers continue to have a presence in the texts through the daughter's actions and thoughts as they respond to the incest. Turpius and Mathilda's father are remorseful for their actions and emotions but Cenci is unchanged and as depraved as ever. Turpius is the only father who survives, his death has been feigned and gives him time to reflect on his actions and seek forgiveness from his daughter.

### **THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF FATHER-DAUGHTER INCEST**

This section will explore the political and social implications of each text as they emerge through the fathers and the suitor(s). Each text offers a distinctive critique—a Jacobite argument in *Exilius*, a critique of a corrupt patriarchal society in *The Cenci*, and an attack on the socially irresponsible inheritors of wealth in *Mathilda*. For particular reasons in each case the father by rupturing the fabric of family threatens society. Barker's use of the English monarchical foundation myth and of rape as a failed conquest brings forward notions of Jacobite politics through the main male figures in *Exilius*—the father Turpius and the suitors

Valerius and Asiaticus. Her narrative encodes an argument for what it will take to bring home the exiled Jacobite king. Clarinthia stands for the daughter England, with Turpius, Valerius and Asiaticus each standing in opposition to William of Orange. Turpius is the James II figure while Asiaticus offers an alternative image of a suitable conqueror, in this sense contrasting to both William of Orange and James II. *The Cenci* is about the worst kind of patriarchal world, corrupt to the core. While Count Cenci is dead by the end of Act 4, Scene 1, his presence is felt throughout the rest of the play. His behaviour, actions and verbal abuses may be gone but once the murder is discovered, the family is not free. Stepping into the shoes of the father is the patriarchal legal institution, an arm of the male-dominated Catholic Church. There will be retribution for the sins against the patriarch because they are akin to an attack on the Pope. *Mathilda* critiques the misuse of inherited wealth. Poor education and an indulgent childhood turn the inheritor of wealth inward towards gratification of his own appetites and passions, rather than outward towards socially responsible behaviour based on one's obligations to others.

### A JACOBITE PLOT IN *EXILIUS*

Kathryn King describes *Exilius* as:

a fittingly pro-Stuart response to the succession crisis of 1714. Turning on a bewildering array of returns from exile, its plot organized around crises of obligation and authority displaced onto a variety of father-child relationships, *Exilius* develops the themes of loyalty, constancy, and obligation beloved of Stuart supporters in the seventeenth century and their Jacobite successors in the next. In the manner of the French heroic romance of the previous century, Madeleine de Scudery's *Clelie* (1654-61) for example, she used Roman history to comment on present affairs of state; as with the royalist dramas of the 1680s to which it is related, the extravagantly heroic plot inscribes codes of loyalty and obligation shown to be inviolable even under the most egregious conditions, including attempted rape and incest. By reaffirming these old-fashioned royalist virtues and celebrating a determination to remain

faithful at all costs, Barker offers in *Exilius* a fiction designed, it would seem, to strengthen Jacobite resolve to resist the House of Hanover and bring home the true king. (*Jane Barker, Exile* 150-151)

Thus she argues that behind *Exilius*'s outward guise is embedded an argument about Jacobite politics. Barker encodes her Jacobite arguments using symbols that carried meaning for readers who understood the tradition of the poets writing at the end of the seventeenth century and into the early eighteenth century, such as Dryden and Pope.<sup>4</sup> I would argue that the father-daughter incest has a key role in the core argument of the novel demonstrating Barker's political commitment to bringing the Jacobites home. This section will examine the two ways that Barker connects her characters to Jacobitism—through her use of the English monarchical foundation myth (associated with Turpius and Valerius) and the use of the images of rape and conquest (associated with Turpius and Asiaticus). Both the foundation myth and images of rape and conquest are both connected with notions of exile and return. The two also overlap and at times are ambiguous. Unfortunately, Barker does not use these ideas as seamlessly as her model, Dryden, does.

### THE ENGLISH MONARCHICAL FOUNDATION MYTH

In *Exilius*, Barker links Turpius with the figure of Aeneas, a central part of the English monarchical foundation myths, and a figure used by other Jacobite writers in encoding political Jacobite arguments. In *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*, Murray Pittock argues that the "symbols of the Stuart dynasty, out of which their account of the nature of their own power grew, derived from both Scottish and Tudor sources" (13). Aeneas, the Trojan, is one of the main symbols in that mythology. Aeneas's grandson, Brutus, is the mythical founder of Britain, hence the:

Brut-myth, which had as its source the “ur-myth of a British people under the great-grandson of Aeneas, Brutus’ created by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century. Thus the English monarchy’s foundation-myth, codified under the Plantagenets and revived under the Tudors, showed the legitimacy of hereditary right as descending from Aeneas. (15-16)

The Brut-myth held that “Aeneas was the emblem of the political legitimacy which allowed the eternal renewal of that justice” (16). Pittock argues that as in “many instances it was not safe to write openly in support of the ideology of Stuart authority,” Jacobite writers developed “a range of codes, secret languages and visual symbols” (23). One of the codes they exploited was the figure of Aeneas, which emphasized that James II’s claim to the throne could not be challenged in terms of hereditary rights as he was the senior heir to

every English and Scottish surviving royal line (save only that of Baliol) since before the Norman Conquest. He was (and not only to Dryden) “God’s Image, God’s Anointed”, the manifest inheritor of a millennium of indefeasible hereditary right. Hence it was of the utmost importance to his opponents that the legitimacy of his successor should fall under suspicion: the origins of the warming-pan story lie in the rock-solid nature of James’s claims. Previous competitors for the crown had often been able to challenge the claims of its holder; James’s were unchallengeable. But in the last four months of the old-style year 1688/9, he was challenged: and defeated. Aeneas left his kingdom; Augustus was ousted. The foundation-myth of England was compromised, and Astraea left the earth, as seemed proven by the famines of William’s reign. Even a century later, the countervailing images of organicism and fertility adopted by the Jacobite cause could be heard, though in an altered form. (28)

Pittock points out that the “forceful image of an exiled Aeneas, a dispossessed Augustus, was developed rapidly by Jacobite writers: not only Dryden . . . but other writers” (38). Barker is an inheritor of this Jacobite encoding also making use of references to Aeneas to point the reader to consider alternative ways of reading the Clarintha-Turpius incest relationship in *Exilius*. After the attempted



rape of his daughter Clarinthia (England), Turpius (Aeneas) is exiled from his home. He must be forgiven by his daughter for that exile to cease.

There are two references in *Exilius* to Aeneas, both connected with Turpius. In the first reference, Clarinthia describes herself as pacing like Queen Dido, Aeneas's lover. She likens herself to and distances herself from Dido.

I fancy I resembled Queen *Dido* (as History describes her) at the departure of her *Aeneas*, and was as much embarrassed and distracted how to avoid my amorous Persecutor, as she cou'd be how to follow or overtake her beloved Fugitive; thus different Causes often produce the same effect, as Glass, which is equally made by Extremities of heat and cold. (I: 47)

In this instance, she paces like Queen Dido, but unlike Dido who wants to follow her lover, Clarinthia wants to escape her "amorous Persecutor," who is Valerius. The emotion of the two situations, she says, is identical. The Aeneas figure of Valerius is connected with Turpius because Valerius assumes his father's role and position after he believes him murdered. In this moment, Clarinthia (Dido) wants to escape her lover Valerius (Turpius/Aeneas) and the incest. The brother and sister standing in for the father and daughter (James II and England) must be reunited for balance to be restored in the nation.

The second reference to Dido is related to Asbella, Turpius's mistress. She tells Turpius that all she has endeavoured to do was make him happy, keeping him within the reach of her embrace. She says: "Had Queen *Dido* done so by her *Trojan* Hero, Despair and Death had not been her only Refuge" (II: 101). She thus casts herself as Dido and Turpius as Aeneas. In this case, Turpius (James II) is being seduced into taking the wrong direction. It is only when he withdraws from this situation that he can be reunited with his daughter and his period of exile come to an end and the nation be restored.

If we see Turpius as Aeneas, although there is much about him that certainly is not a James II figure, the story operates at an allegorical level in which Turpius comes to represent James and Clarinthia, England. If this is so, then the forgiveness at the end of the novel makes sense. Aeneas/Turpius returns begging the daughter for forgiveness, forgiveness he needs because he failed to conquer, to fight off William. Barker implies that it is possible for the Stuart dynasty to return to rule England.

### IMAGES OF RAPE AND CONQUEST

The attempted rape of Clarinthia is a failure to conquer that leads to the exile of the perpetrator. Turpius cannot come back into the fold of society without reconciliation with the daughter. In his article “Literature and the Jacobite Cause: Was there a Rhetoric of Jacobitism?” Howard Erskine-Hill argues that “the polemical and sensational image of rape” (49) was used to express ideas of rightful or wrongful conquest by both Williamites and Jacobites. In this sense it was confusing because on one hand it represented James as ravishing England, on the other it was William who ravaged and plundered the country. The “accusation of conquest and the image of rape reverberated through political pamphlets and poems” (50) throughout the era. In *Poetry of Opposition and Revolution*, Erskine-Hill argues that the rape image is still current when Pope produces *The Rape of the Lock* in 1712. Therefore, it was current when Barker was writing *Exilius*. Erskine-Hill argues that the political dimension of *The Rape of the Lock* is accessible through an understanding of the rape imagery, a dimension “occluded and forgotten when the poem came to be read as almost pure social comedy” (75). It is my conjecture that the daughter in *Exilius*, in this case Clarinthia represents England and Turpius, James II. The attempted rape in *Exilius* then represents the

failure of James to hold out against William of Orange, with reconciliation available only through forgiveness.

Barker's question about whether there are any conditions under which incest can be forgiven seems radical to the modern reader. The attempted rape of Clarinthia throws light on issues of obedience and allegiance to the father explored throughout novel. To whom do daughters pledge allegiance—the husband or the father? This came into question for Jacobites because Mary gave her obedience to William of Orange who usurped her father's throne. Paul Monod argues that for the Jacobite the father retained obedience because he holds the paternal power in line with God. Thus William and Mary's crime of taking the English throne was seen as "parricide":

Mary was anathematized in Jacobite verse as "The Female Parricide," a "monster" unique in history except for the Roman Tullia and King Lear's daughter Goneril. Arthur Mainwaring, a Jacobite poet who later converted to Whiggery, was the author of "Tarquin and Tullia," a mythic story of usurpation set "In times when Princes cancell'd nature's law . . . /When children used their parents to dethrone." Murdering one's father was no simple crime, even before Freud's Oedipus . . . For the Jacobite poet, however, it was an unnatural act; "nature's law" stipulated obedience to fathers. Patriarchy was a divine rather than a human institution and violating it was an offence against God. (55)

This view of the daughter as committing parricide is not the view within *Exilius*. Clarinthia does not kill her father—who of course, in the end he has not even died—even though she believes she is in some way to blame for the fact that he dies as a result of attacking her. As a result, she is reluctant to ally herself with Asiaticus, her father's slayer. Clarinthia, unlike Mary, remains obedient to her father throughout all her trials signaling the importance of family alliance and loyalty. She does not let herself simply accept her love for Asiaticus, even considers life as a nun rather than marry the man who killed her father. *Exilius* is

clear. The daughter always owes obedience to her father. This is the crux of Clarinthia's angst. She is unable to love her rescuer because she believes he has killed her father. Taking a life (even in defence) is portrayed as worse than the attempted rape. Clarinthia is in a bind: she cannot contemplate the stranger as her lover and thus possible husband because he has slain her father, the first object of her obedience. Yet, the choices of some of the parents are questioned in the novel. The choice of Jemella's and Marcellus's choice of a marriage in minority is questioned as is Turpius's choice of Valerius as husband for Clarinthia. Thus, perhaps the novel laments the marriage of Mary to William of Orange. *Exilius* does not just reinforce the importance of family alliance: what is vital is marriage within the correct social structures.

#### FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

A satisfactory end of the novel also depends upon the forgiveness of the rape and ensuring that the forthcoming marriages meet the requirements of alliance, an important social notion to Jacobites. When Cordiala and Ismenus meet they are both servants, but at the end, Ismenus is identified as the lost son of Publius Scipio who then refuses to allow him to marry Cordiala. Cordiala knows:

herself too low in Quality and Fortune ever to marry a Scipio, nevertheless found it impossible to disengage her Heart from those tender Sentiments the lovely Youth had infus'd. O cruel Passion, said she to herself, that in spite of all Endeavours subjects us to thy Tyranny; yet I am happy in this, *Scipio* knows not what Power he has over me nor ever shall; I will dye rather than discover my Folly. (II: 114-115)

An equally upset Ismenus says:

Ah unhappy *Scipo*! It had been well for me if I had still been ignorant whose son I was, and only know myself to be the poor *Ismenus*; then might I have loved the fair *Cordiala* without Controul: Yesterday I had no Chains to wear but hers, no Commands to obey but the Motion of her Eyes, no Friends to

oblige, No Honours to comply with, no Grandeur to seek, no Parents to obey; all concenter'd in her alone. (II: 122)

Ismenus decides after much consideration that he must be obedient to his father and “leave this only Object of my Life’s Happiness; sacrifice all Satisfaction to the Honour of my Family, and the Repose of *Cordiala*” (II: 123). His decision means that obedience and family loyalty triumph. In the final three pages of the novel it is revealed that Cordiala is Catullus’s son and Exlius’s sister and thus worthy of Ismenus. This reconciles Catullus with his two children, Exilius and Cordiala, Catullus with his old friend Publius Scipio and allows the young lovers to prepare for a union through marriage. The prediction is also made that Ismenus will make a name for himself in conquering Africa as his brother did in conquering Asia, more acts worthy of a great family.

Each of the happily resolved couplings—Clarinthia’s and Asiaticus’s is the most difficult to achieve—at the end of the novel align family houses appropriately and in line with Jacobite thinking. As Daniel Szechi points out in *The Jacobites: Britain and Europe 1688-1788*:

Jacobite society in Britain revolved around networks of kinship and sociability. In some ways the other core groups within Jacobitism were simply emulating the endogamous, but widespread, family connections the Anglo-Scottish Catholic community had used to preserve itself for the previous 200 years. Endogamy ensured the next generation was brought up in the right political and religious principles and that those steeped in the lore and beliefs of Jacobitism were not lost to the cause. Marriage patterns dedicated to sustaining “sound” family connections can, however, only really explain how patrician Jacobitism survived. Plebeians rarely married endogamously or even within the locality from which they originated. Their kith and kin changed from generation to generation, and yet certain wards in the major cities and areas in the countryside remained obstinately Jacobite from generation to generation. In the country this often stemmed from the abiding commitment to the cause of local landowners, though we should not underrate the ability of plebeian connections to formulate and pass on their own perception of political reality. In the cities plebeian Jacobitism seems to have settled early in certain areas, and

as like attracts like, generated its own semi-permanent sub-culture.  
(24)

Barker is promoting the endogamous alliances of family in *Exilius* and obedience to the father is central to promoting such alliances. For Clarinthia and Asiaticus to bring an alliance for their two families, Clarinthia has to remain obedient to her father and then to forgive him. This is what happens when Turpius turns up alive. Clarinthia falls to his feet and begs for his pardon and all is forgiven in a “Shower of Tears” (II: 105). Given the fast moving ending of the novel and its tidy resolutions, and the fact that at least the Preface could have been finished as late as 1712, it is likely that this section of the text may have been written closer to publication than the earlier parts which allude to early uprisings and events in James’s reign. It is difficult to know whether this was penned before James’s death in 1701 or after. Since Barker slowly moved from coterie poet to novelist in the early part of the century, it was probably after. Therefore, her text is yearning for past possibilities. Although Anne, who came to the throne in 1702 on the death of William of Orange, was a Stuart, she was a Protestant Stuart. After 1702, then, it seemed less likely, despite ongoing Jacobite uprisings that the Catholic Stuarts could again hold the throne.

Clarinthia’s forgiveness of Turpius reflects a Jacobite outlook. She remains obedient to her father through all her trials and then is able to forgive him. The circumstance under which Clarinthia forgives her father is not straightforward. To the end, Clarinthia blames herself. She believes that something she has done has caused the events that have changed her life. For the modern reader this is a particularly difficult passage. Clarinthia’s ease of forgiveness is troubling. Turpius is, of course, no longer the man who attempted to rape her. Like Rochester at the end of *Jane Eyre* he is physically scarred, a

“miserable spectacle of Deformity” (II: 103). He is outwardly the monster of his acts but inwardly repentant. This is perhaps the most radical point in the novel, the daughter believed herself the monster who inspired the deed, the father at the end looks like a monster capable of carrying out incest. His outward appearance declares his sins to all. The forgiveness of the incest or attempted rape is not just a necessary resolution to this story, it reflects Barker’s political outlook. *Exilius* is about exiles returning and being taken back into the fold. Forgiveness is necessary, despite the gravity of any action between daughter and father, for this to be possible. James II could not come home without a resolution between him and his daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange. Looking back across time it seems highly unlikely that such a feat would have happened nevertheless Barker espouses the crux of the Jacobite problem. Forgiveness, of course, is also in line with the Catholic philosophy of seeking absolution through confession. The daughter, even though not a religious leader, is able to forgive her father because he seeks to confess his sins to her.

*Exilius* perhaps also contains a hint of disappointment at the failure to bring James II and the Jacobites home. By the time that Barker was becoming a novelist in the 1700s, it would have been clear to her—even though there were still uprisings and political machinations—that the heyday of the Catholic Stuarts had perhaps passed. James was dead, his protestant daughter on the throne and James’s heir did not seem willing to try for the throne. In fact, after *Exilius*, there would be only two more major actions taken by the Jacobites. The first was in 1715 just after *Exilius* was published. The final uprising came after Barker’s death when Bonnie Prince Charlie—James II’s grandson—set his sights on the English throne but was defeated at Culloden Moor in 1745.

### THE PERVERTED PATRIARCHAL WORLD OF *THE CENCI*

In the last part of her book, [*Father-Daughter Incest*, Judith] Herman explains that the daughter's disclosure of incest is often resisted not just by fathers, who stand to lose their families, jobs and liberty, but by powerful members of communities—judges, lawyers, ministers—who do not want to think that incest occurs in the traditional families that they so prize. The daughter who discloses will thus encounter denial, resistance, and possibly violence. (Doane and Hodges 57)

This is the way that Percy Shelley's play portrays attitudes to Beatrice in Act 5.

While he was alive, Cenci stopped Beatrice disclosing his crimes by removing her from society, keeping her within the home and later the Castle of Petrella. When Cenci is no longer alive, other members of the patriarchy, the judges, step in and refuse to listen. No matter how many times Beatrice tries to ask what about Cenci's crime, she is ignored. She has to answer to a corrupt legal institution that recognises her crime as a major transgression against the patriarchy. Cenci's crimes—including the murders mentioned in the play's opening but specifically the rape—are not seen the same way. As already noted, Beatrice's crime can be named, Cenci's cannot. If the play is interpreted as an incest story, the emphasis on "male power as a cause of silencing" (52) comes to the fore. Just like the "feminist incest" stories that came much later, Percy Shelley locates the power in the father as the one who manages the family money highlighting the inequalities between men and women in the home. "In incestuous families, fathers are dictatorial providers and mothers economically dependent, ill or absent" (56). In *The Cenci*, Lucretia too is economically dependent and powerless.

Percy Shelley expresses similar anxieties about the family that come to the fore in later incest stories: "Anxieties about the family life reflect anxieties about the well-being of the nation, itself often portrayed as a family" (55). For Percy Shelley the corruption in the family reflects directly on the greater society and in



this instance the Roman Catholic establishment that controls this society. In his Preface, Percy Shelley draws a distinction between the attitudes of Protestants and Catholics toward religion. He suggests that Protestants will find “something unnatural in the earnest and perpetual sentiment of the relations between God and man which pervade the tragedy of *Cenci*” (71). But, he says:

religion in Italy is not, as in Protestant countries, a cloak to be worn on particular days; or a passport which those who do not wish to be railed at carry with them to exhibit; or a gloomy passion for penetrating the impenetrable mysteries of our being, which terrifies its possessor at the darkness of the abyss to the brink of which it has conducted him. (71-72)

Instead, he says, faith for the “Italian Catholic” is “interwoven with the whole fabric of life” (72).

It is adoration, faith, submission, penitence, blind admiration; not a rule for moral conduct. It has no necessary connexion with any one virtue. The most atrocious villain may be rigidly devout, and, without any shock to established faith, confess himself to be so. Religion pervades intensely the whole frame of society, and is, according to the temper of the mind which it inhabits, a passion, a persuasion, an excuse, a refuge; never a check. (72)

He sees a society that can accept depraved and villainous behaviour and forgive it through confession, a society that is blind to the plight of a character such as Beatrice. Alan M. Weinberg suggests that despite his concern about Catholic attitudes, he is not “condoning Protestant alternatives. Protestantism has not succeeded in disabusing itself either of paternalism or the retributive character of its predecessor” (7). Instead, Weinberg suggests that Percy Shelley considers that “religion leads inevitably to superstition, idolatry and self-justification when it insists on the creed of obedience, a creed which makes it a vengeful oppressor of the free human spirit” (7).

Percy Shelley highlights not only the corruption of a society that lets the father buy his way out of his crimes but an unequally balanced society that does not value the daughter enough. Her powerlessness is extreme in this play, completely underscoring the failure of society to protect and adequately provide for her. Doane and Hodges identify the problem with the “feminist incest story” as casting all men as potentially incest perpetrators. Percy Shelley was not part of the movement that reveals to the world the problems of the nuclear family. Instead, based on an historical story, he is speculating about the act that drove a daughter to kill her father. While Percy Shelley is firmly aligning the incest with abuse, it is not child sexual abuse in the terms now currently used. Beatrice is not the girl-child raped by her father described by Elizabeth Ward in *Father Daughter Rape*. She is the daughter of marriageable age who comes before the judge as an adult and is expected to admit her part in the murder. Nevertheless, the application of the “feminist incest story” model shows that in many ways Percy Shelley was radical in his conception of Beatrice and her dilemma. It is the incest that throws light on the male-centred society that privileges the father over the daughter—hence Beatrice’s silence. The incest indicates a perversion within the Cenci family, which sees the father claim the daughter sexually instead of making a new family alliance. It is the incest that helps us understand the complexities of Beatrice—far from being inconsistent, her behaviour is consistent with someone who has been raped and abused and realises that the system cannot cope with her declaration.

In some ways, Beatrice has the attitude of a survivor. In modern incest survivor narratives, the girls (often women by the time they recover their memories), step outside the boundaries of the socially acceptable because the

social system is part of what has let them down. For example in *A Thousand Acres*, Ginny settles for a life that in many ways to us seems limiting and therefore unacceptable. In Jean Vormair's *Don't Touch Me Daddy!* Jennifer walks away from her marriage and the life she had been leading. Victoria in Georgia Savage's *The House Tibet* and Lilian in Kate Grenville's *Lilian's Story* live on the streets. These are survivors who find their own way forward and somehow outside social expectations. Beatrice also escapes the expectations. She steps outside social boundaries by refusing to answer to the court set to judge her. Her silence is not just a denial of her guilt as it is often read but is a refusal to answer to those who condemn her when the system was responsible for her treatment. There is no doubt that this play is a critique of the society it represents. It condemns the society dominated by a religious institution that allows a corrupt man and murderer to buy his way out of his crimes. It reflects a society in decay. The corruption extends from the church down into the family through the male figures. While Beatrice's actions are not condoned in the play, her actions ensure that the family will continue. She saves Bernardo, allowing for some reinstatement of a less-corrupt domestic sphere. Applying an incest frame to the play also allows the perceived inconsistencies in the character of Beatrice to be more clearly understood. For Michael Worton, Beatrice is forced to refuse "to enter the linguistic world of human justice, since she sees no correspondence between her act and 'what men call a crime', she abandons even her denial of guilt, challenging the judges" (115-116). He adds:

If justice exists in the world, Beatrice must be punished for the parricide she has committed, but, from the opening line of the play, the spectator finds himself in an ambiguous world where crimes both legal and moral, can be concealed, where Cenci's indeterminate murder will be overlooked if he cedes land to the Pope. (117)

In the end there is only one conclusion, that the society is “culpable.” As Stephen G. Behrendts says:

we are pressed inexorably towards [Percy] Shelley’s conclusion that the entire system that has placed Beatrice in her dilemma is both culpable and morally insupportable, a system of terrifying perversion in which, as Stuart Curran has written, “to act is to commit evil.” (215)

In “Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *The Cenci* and the Rhetoric of Tyranny,”

Suzanne Ferriss sees *The Cenci* as not just critiquing the particular world of the play, but as reflecting on the French Revolution and thus delivering a warning to Regency society about the dangers of “revolutionary excesses” (208) and the limits of language in recuperating “revolutionary energy and ideals” (209). She argues that Beatrice’s:

murder of her father, a willed response to the sexual and psychic oppression he has imposed through incestuous assaults, is an unwitting perversion of the revolutionary impulse in politics, and ultimately, in language. Her vengeful assault ironically mirrors that which it seeks to counter, her father’s despotism. Her parricide is a postrevolutionary act, tracing the historical narrative of the French Revolution’s inevitable decline into violent excesses. (209)

She goes on to argue that the silence of the play surrounding the incest and Cenci’s murder “turns the repressive violence of the Reign of Terror onto language itself” (209). The “machinations surrounding the passage of” (209) the petition to the Pope, the warrant for Cenci’s arrest and Orsino’s letter to Beatrice produced at the trial:

recall the manipulative discourse of Terror, a form of linguistic tyranny practiced under the guise of revolution. Recognition that language aided, abetted, justified, and finally covered up violent excesses casts doubt on the playwright’s own attempts to realize revolution in and through poetic language. The manipulations of language and document in the drama thus call into question the very possibility of poetically restoring revolutionary ideals. (209)

In line with this argument she sees Cenci as a revolutionary figure, an “aristocratic libertine” (210) who is “transformed into a self-serving promoter of personal liberty” (210). The incest becomes associated with the revolutionary mythology, popular during the French Revolution, of the rape of Lucretia with Cenci’s violence allying “itself with the sexual transgression credited with toppling the Tarquin kings and ushering in the Roman Republic” (211).

In his dramatic portrait of rape in *The Cenci*, [Percy] Shelley ironically invokes Revolutionary imagery of the body politic and its violation to highlight the political movement failure. He represents Cenci, the perverted revolutionary, as imposing terroristic violence that echoes and rivals monarchist oppression. His incestuous assault springs simultaneously then from the “vitiated mind” of revolutionary excess criticized by Burke and what his opponent, Thomas Paine, termed the “degraded mind that existed before the Revolution, and which the Revolution is calculated to reform” in Mary Wollstonecraft’s paradoxical formulation, Cenci’s is “the despotism of licentious freedom.” (211)

Beatrice’s crime, she argues, “debases the revolutionary impulses for it, too, is a tyrannical instance of oppressive force” (217):

Moreover, her murder of her father clearly invokes popular representations of revolutionary action as “a kind of oedipal killing of the old, paternal regime.” Such references to the political parricide committed by the French were by no means positive, however, and instead meant to censure the French for their excessive use of violence, as Burke does when he upbraids “those children of their country who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces.” (217)

Thus Beatrice’s crime “ironically appears as a mirror-image of that which it seeks to counter, her father’s despotism. Her action is reflected in the distorted mirror of revolution and liberty held up by Cenci” (220).

Ferriss argues that through Beatrice, Percy Shelley is questioning the “possibility of *any* revolutionary action following the disillusioning example of France” (225).

He passes both poetic creation and political revolution through the postrevolutionary prism of his drama. In Beatrice's arbitrary use of violence and, above all, in the discourse she employs to justify and veil this act, *The Cenci* casts doubt on the possibility that the revolutionary ideals betrayed in France by the Terror and Napoleon's rise to power may be recuperated in Regency England either politically or poetically. . . . Instead, the revolutionary potential of both political action and poetic production bear the brunt of [Percy] Shelley's skepticism in this radical questioning of the legislator's potential to effect positive change, whether functioning as the people's recognized political representative or their "unacknowledged" advocate, the poet. (225)

Ferriss's argument is persuasive but still does not completely deal with the issue of Beatrice's silence and the fact that she is never heard. In depicting her as having no choice, perhaps Percy Shelley is alluding to the issue that comes when the monarchy, government, or any governing body loses contact with its people and does not hear them. Revolutionary action, if that's how Cenci's murder is understood, is the only answer. Thus, Percy Shelley can be seen as questioning the whole structure of society. There is no simple answer put forward but an avoidance of excess is essential and, perhaps, a greater understanding of all parts of society—father and daughters, patriarchs and people.

For the twentieth-century reader, *The Cenci* is particularly fascinating because it offers a feminist critique of a society by a male writer that demonstrates the subjugation of daughters. These daughters are voiceless and silent in the face of abuse at the hands of their protectors. And yet its depiction of the daughter of marriageable age and her speaking of her experience makes it a play of its time.

### **A WORLD OF INDULGENCE AND EXCESS IN *MATHILDA***

Just like Count Cenci, Mathilda's father lives on in the novel through the rest of Mathilda's story after his suicide. She is wedded to him; she too comes to realise that she loves him and the story turns to become her story of grief and her longing for death to join him. Through the father's indulgences and excesses, it is

possible to see that Mary Shelley is critiquing the sector of English society that exists on and misuses inherited wealth. Because he has money, Mathilda's father indulges his every want—from childhood, he “squander[s] immense sums of money to satisfy passing whims” (177). He is able to do whatever he pleases:

He was nurtured in prosperity and attended by all its advantages; every one loved him and wished to gratify him. He was ever employed in promoting the pleasures of his companions—but their pleasures were his; and if he bestowed more attention upon the feelings of others than is usual with schoolboys it was because his social temper could never enjoy itself if every brow was not as free from care as his own. (177)

Mathilda is adamant that his education is poor. His education was started by a “weak mother with all the indulgence she thought due to a nobleman of wealth” (176). “Under the influence of these circumstances his passions found a deep soil wherein they might strike their roots and flourish either as flowers or weeds as was their nature” (176). He learns about passion from novels and the effect is not positive:

Novels and all the various methods by which youth in civilized life are led to a knowledge of the existence of passions before they really feel them, had produced a strong effect on him who was so peculiarly susceptible of every impression. (178)

Here Mary Shelley feeds into an ongoing debate in the long eighteenth century about the negative influence of novels. Jacqueline Pearson argues that novel-reading was “one of the most contested areas in cultural debate” (196). While most of that debate was about the dangers of women reading, Mary Shelley deflects this debate on to the father. It is implied that his novel-reading leads him astray, as it does Arabella in *The Female Quixote*. Mary Shelley subverts the alliance of Mathilda and her father in the same way that she switches the gender roles of Adam and Eve.

At college Mathilda's father pays no attention to formal classwork:

he believed that he had other lessons to learn than those which they could teach him. He was now to enter into life and he was still young enough to consider study as a school-boy shackle, employed merely to keep the unruly out of mischief but as having no real connexion with life—whose wisdom of riding—gaming &c. he considered with far deeper interest—So he quickly entered into all college follies although his heart was too well moulded to be contaminated by them—it might be light but it was never cold. (177)

He takes nothing about life seriously. His “heart” (177) which has already been “moulded” (177) by excessive passions is further “contaminated” (177) by his interest in gaming and other similar pursuits. Again, access to “immense sums of money” (177) enables him to pamper his whims. At no time during these years does he consider life anything but for his pleasure, he sees himself as having no obligations and no duties. Mathilda suggests that because of the company he kept he never improved his mind:

He was a sincere and sympathizing friend—but he had met with none who superior or equal to himself could aid him in unfolding his mind, or make him seek for fresh stores of thought by exhausting the old ones. He felt himself superior in quickness of judgement to those around him: his talents, his rank and wealth made him the chief of his party, and in that station he rested not only contented but glorying, conceiving it to be the only ambition worthy for him to attain in the world. (177)

Wealth provided Mathilda’s father with his position in society and among his friends. This contrasts completely with Woodville who did not assume he was “superior” and earned his place in the world through merit.

Mathilda’s father improves once he marries Diana—she turns him into “a distinguished member of society, a Patriot; and an enlightened lover of truth and virtue” (179)—but this is temporary. His tendency to excess returns after she dies when he imagines himself so distraught from her death that he neglects his responsibilities and roams the world. He fails to look after his properties and abandons his daughter.



When he finally takes Mathilda to the family's Yorkshire property the neglect of the family holding for the past sixteen years is clear:

When we arrived, after a little rest, he led me over the house and pointed out to me the rooms which my mother had inhabited. Although more than sixteen years had passed since her death nothing had been changed; her work box, her writing desk were still there and in her room a book lay open on the table as she had left it. (195)

There is no evidence to suggest that Mathilda's father thinks it is strange that nothing has been altered at the property or in the house since Diana's death but, of course, with no one to take charge or to issue orders, nothing has been done since her death. In one of the few outside comments that Mathilda includes, she notes the steward's concern about the state of her father and his hope for better times on the estate with her father's return (195):

"Alas!" said the old man who gave me this account with tears in his eyes, "it wrings my heart to see my lord in this state: when I heard that he was coming down here with you, my young lady, I thought we should have the happy days over again that we enjoyed during the short life of my lady your mother—But that would be too much happiness for us poor creatures born to tears—and that was why she was taken from us so soon. She was too beautiful and good for us. It was a happy day as we all thought it when my lord married her: I knew her when she was a child and many a good turn has she done for me in my old lady's time—You are like her although there is more of my lord in you—But has he been thus ever since his return? All my joy turned to sorrow when I first beheld him with that melancholy countenance enter these doors as it were the day after my lady's funeral—He seemed to recover himself a little after he had bidden me write to you—but still it is a woful thing to see him so unhappy." These were the feelings of an old, faithful servant: what must be those of an affectionate daughter. Alas! Even then my heart was almost broken. (195)

The steward's hopes of "happy days" are soon dashed and the property is once again to be abandoned and neglected by Mathilda's father.

Through the father and his comparison to Woodville, it is possible to see that in the sector of society that exists on inherited wealth, poor education and

indulgence can lead to the neglect of obligations and duties. Also where passions are allowed to be indulged, incest is a distinct possibility. When those with inherited wealth are prone to excess, all moral foundation in that sector of society is likely to fail and thus the future is at risk. Mathilda is powerless to stop what occurs. Perhaps the fact that she turns her back on her wealth after her father's declaration and suicide, is in some way indicative of her understanding that she was momentarily in a life of indulgence and excess, which ultimately could not support her. Although *Mathilda* is the least political of these the three texts, it does look to a sector of society to explain the possible cause of incest. The blame lies with the education and upbringing of the father, who in contrast to Woodville, is able through his wealth to indulge himself and give in to excess.

In a letter to Maria Gisborne dated November 16, 1819, Percy Bysshe Shelley argues that:

Incest is like many other *incorrect* things a very poetical circumstance. It may be the excess of love or of hate. It may be the defiance of every thing for the sake of another which clothes itself in the glory of the highest heroism, or it may be that cynical rage which confounding the good & bad in existing opinions breaks through them for the purpose of rioting in selfishness & antipathy. (Frederick L. Jones *Letters* 2:124)

This may be a response to reading Calderon, but provides a useful insight into the difference between the father-daughter incest in *The Cenci* and Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*. *The Cenci* is a story of excessive hate and "cynical rage." Percy Shelley could well be describing Francesco Cenci who is "rioting in selfishness & antipathy." *Mathilda*, on the other hand, portrays incest as an excess of love. In some ways, the actions of Mathilda's father could be read as "the defiance of every thing for the sake of another which clothes itself in the glory of the highest heroism." Although it is portrayed in the end as a selfish act, through suicide,

Mathilda's father thought to release her from his guilty love. Margaret Davenport Garrett suggests that, while the novel depicts the father's "excess of love," it explores the daughter's "defiance of everything for the sake of another" (48). I would argue, however, that the daughter's love is also excessive. Extreme emotion is clearly dangerous, particularly when it can be indulged.

## CONCLUSION

All three texts offer different societal critiques—each does so through the male figures of the father and suitor(s). The texts show the daughter's powerlessness to change the course of their father's actions and desires—both sexual and for power—yet they struggle to articulate the events. All three wealthy patriarchs are prone to indulgence: Turpius gives into his sexual desires firstly with his mistress undermining his marriage and then with his daughter; Cenci is evil, and delights in torture and murder; Mathilda's father gives into his every whim. These fathers are not capable of carrying forth society. The family in these cases functions as a microcosm of larger society and the father's actions will only lead to the destruction of society. Because the daughters can only articulate within the domestic sphere, it is through the male figures that the political implications of father-daughter incest are developed.

*Exilius* is a political Jacobite novel, which is multilayered and complex. The father-daughter incest is particularly complex. At first glance it operates as a railing against a patriarchal system whereas encoded is a debate about family alliance, loyalty and reunion—a Jacobite argument that dreams of bringing the exiled king and the preferred religion home. The father-daughter incest not only represents the marriage exchange gone wrong hence the incestuous desire of the father but also an extension of this—the marriage contract gone wrong, and the

resulting destruction of the family. Mary and William's marriage ultimately placed a wedge between father and daughter as the son-in-law usurped the father's crown. Forgiveness and reunion was the only possible way of reversing this rift.

*The Cenci* expresses anxieties about a corrupt society that allows the domestic arena to become a torture chamber and thus threaten the future of society. In this case the corruption is not just contained within the domestic sphere, it goes to the very head of this society, the Pope. The church, the leading institution, is corrupt with the greed of its members leading them to accept crime—murder and torture—in exchange for money. Corruption has become part of the economic exchange in this world, a situation the play condemns.

The least political of all the three texts, *Mathilda* sees incest as a possibility in a society based on inherited wealth that does not pay enough attention to the education of its children, which has far reaching effects on the society's future. Poor education leads, in the cases of those who have access to wealth, to a generation who does not understand their duties and obligations. Their wealth allows them to indulge their whims and live a life of excess. Thus Mathilda's father neglects his duties to his land and tenants and to his daughter and indulges his emotions; when his passion and sexual desire become excessive incest is the result.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The father is the central speaker and controls the narrative in two twentieth century novels I have come across, Kate Grenville's *Dark Places* and Raul Schmidt's *Daddy: an erotic memoir*, but this is rare.

<sup>2</sup> As the six pages of the Preface to *Exilius* are unnumbered, I will refer to them as i to vi.

<sup>3</sup> Barker's own interest in Fénelon existed beyond *Telemachus*. In 1718 she translated his work of Lenten meditations, *The Christian Pilgrimage* into English as part of her Catholic-Jacobite project aiming to make "Catholic materials palatable to non-Catholic readers" (King, *Jane Barker, Exile* 157) as well as "to soften resistance to the notion of a Catholic monarch on the English throne" (157).

<sup>4</sup> In *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*, Murray Pittock argues that Dryden was one of the main writers to provide subsequent Jacobite writers with the legacies of "encoding". For example, in his translation of the *Aeneid*, he describes Augustus' accession, that is William's accession "as a 'Usurpation' upon the 'Freedom' of the Roman people" (101), condemning him through comparisons between the "pious Trojan" (102), that is James, and the "English parricide" (102), that is Mary and William. "William is an unrighteous Augustus, an anti-Aeneas: rather than merely reflecting the failures of Aeneas . . . Dryden uses Aeneas to expose William's actions through both analogy and disparity. But Dryden's pyrotechnics do not stop here. Typological disparity is confirmed by historical disparity: Augustus did not claim the throne during his uncle Caesar's lifetime (James was William's uncle as well as his father-in-law). So *unlike* Aeneas, William has usurped his father-in-law's crown, and *unlike* Augustus, he has usurped his uncle's authority. Moreover, Dryden's comparison of William with Brutus and Cassius in *Don Sebastian* . . . brings to mind the fact that these traitors were the slayers of Caesar and defeated by Augustus. Thus William can neither satisfactorily be the exiled Aeneas or the restored Augustus, although he is compared to both. Dryden makes such comparisons only to destabilize them" (102).

## CONCLUSION

Caroline Gonda argues that whether the “threat was fulfilled or not” (38) incest was a “standard literary device by the late eighteenth century” (38). She believes that the “father-daughter relationship in all its passion, perplexity and murkiness” was central to the developing novel (1) and that:

much of what the reading daughters learned from “daughters’ fictions”—heroine-centred novels of family, life, courtship and marriage—might bolster rather than undermine familial and social order . . . [T]he focus on the family as *the* primary unit of social order makes it impossible for the emerging novel to represent conscious and deliberate incest, especially between father and daughter. An age which insists so vehemently on the love between father and daughter must also insist on the purity of that love. (xvi)

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that when texts do explore “conscious and deliberate incest” as in the case of *Exilius*, *The Cenci* and *Mathilda*, they are as Karen Jacobson McLennan argues fated to be “suppressed, forgotten or never read” (1). This is the least true of *The Cenci*—*Exilius* has largely been forgotten, *Mathilda* although penned in 1819 only made it into public circulation in the 1990s and *The Cenci*, while becoming a well-known literary work, has not had the stage success that was Percy Shelley’s aim.

This conclusion will be divided into two sections. The first will examine the fate of each text in terms of both publication history and critical responses. The second will explore the fate of the notion of the marriage exchange gone wrong. I will argue that by the time the Shelleys were writing at the end of the long eighteenth century, changes in the conception of childhood saw the beginnings of a move towards redefining incest as child sexual abuse, a notion not fully developed until the late 1960s and early 1970s. I will step back into the

gallery introduced in the Preface and Introduction to trace this development through the evolution in the representations of Beatrice Cenci.

## THE FATE OF THE TEXTS

Loss and suppression are features of the publication histories of *Exilius* and *Mathilda*. *Exilius* has only been on the bookshop shelves once since the middle of the long eighteenth century. Garland Publishing offered the novel for sale in 1973 in a folio edition as part of the company's Foundations of the Novel series. Before that, the previous record of sale was 1743. *Mathilda* was first published in 1959 after having been suppressed by Mary Shelley's father William Godwin but its circulation was still limited and again it dropped from sight. Then in the early 1990s, a growing interest in the text and the author's work saw it incorporated into Mary Shelley readers and complete editions of her works. *The Cenci* has neither been lost nor suppressed; instead, it is a well-known literary text that has inspired many other writers to explore the subject of incest. However, it has struggled to be accepted in its rightful form as a work for the stage. *Exilius* and *The Cenci* have had the least critical attention of Barker's and Percy Shelley's works. This is less true of *Mathilda*. Until recently, the novel was overwhelmingly interpreted through a biographical framework, which drew attention away from the text as an entity in itself.

### EXILIUS

After its first publication in 1714, *Exilius* was teamed with *Loves Intrigues* and in 1719 published as *The Entertaining Novels*. *The Entertaining Novels* were published again in 1735 and 1743, but King questions whether these were reissues rather than later editions:

The “third edition” of *Entertaining Novels* (London: Bettesworth, Hitch and Curll, 1736) by “the late Mrs. Jane Barker” was advertised in the *London Magazine* monthly catalogue in Sept. 1735. It was advertised 13 May 1736 in the *London Evening Post* as part of a ten-volume collection of novels intended for the “Entertainment of Gentlemen and Ladies”. *EN* [*Entertaining Novels*] was advertised 11 Sept. 1731 in the *Daily Post* in “Four Pocket Volumes”, printed for Bettesworth and Hitch, and in 1736 in the *London Evening Post* as part of a ten-vol. set. A 1743 edition came out under the imprint of C. Hitch. Closer bibliographical scrutiny might reveal that they are not “editions” but rather reissued sheets of the 1719 edition, suggesting perhaps a publisher’s attempt to move slowly selling material. The relative scarcity of surviving copies, with not even more than one “edition” in the BL, leaves this matter open to bibliographical investigation. (189-190 note 26)

Since then *Exilius* has been published only once—in 1973 as a folio edition by Garland Publishing.

The only critical edition of Barker’s work currently in print is *The Galesia Trilogy*, edited by Carol Shiner Wilson in 1997, which includes *Loves Intrigues*, *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies* and *The Lining of the Patch Work Screen* and selected poems from the *Magdalen Manuscript*. Barker’s unpublished works include the manuscript *Poems Referring to the Times*, which explain her conversion to Catholicism and contain attacks on William of Orange, which she presented in 1701 to the young Prince of Wales, the 12-year-old James Frances Stuart, destined to become the Old Pretender. Her major poetical output is in *Poetical Recreations*, which includes 51 pieces of largely coterie verse—Pindaric Odes, ballads and songs, verse epistles, meditative lyrics and elegies—printed without her authorization. *Poetical Recreations* also includes “unrelated verse by a number of men” and some poems to and about Barker (King “*Poetical Recreations* and the Sociable Text” 552).

*Exilius* has received the least critical attention of Barker’s works. Her pre-1700 poetry and the later Patchwork novels have attracted the most attention. A



number of early twentieth-century critical works—Charlotte Morgan’s 1911 text *The Rise of the Novel of Manners* which was reissued in 1939 and 1963, Myra Reynold’s 1920 text *The Learned Lady in England 1650-1760*, Joyce M. Horner’s 1930 *The English Women Novelists and their Connection with the Feminist Movement (1688-1797)*, and B.G. MacCarthy’s 1944 *The Female Pen*—transmitted Barker’s work, particularly *Exilius*, to later scholars. Carol Shiner Wilson argues that: “Barker now figures prominently in scholarship examining female authorship, the shift from manuscript to print publication, the emergence of the novel, and Jacobite poetry” (“Jane Barker (1652-1732)” 40).<sup>1</sup> Morgan, MacCarthy, and later John Richetti writing in the 1960s, are influential in positioning Barker in the school of “moral didacticism,” which sees her placed as a Daughter of Orinda, the seventeenth-century poet Katherine Philips. King argues that this view of Barker’s work is limiting. This “rather dowdy role in literary history” sees her “cast . . . as an exemplar of the new and, it need almost not be said, deeply dull string of ladylike respectability in fiction by women” (*Jane Barker, Exile* 7). King argues that Katherine Philips figures only in “Barker’s later novelistic self-authorizations” not in the St-Germain verse, “perhaps because Orinda’s largely lyrical poetic oeuvre offered no precedent for the kind of epic scope Barker sought in her Jacobite verse-chronicle” (*Jane Barker, Exile* 7)<sup>2</sup> Instead, King wants Barker acknowledged as a Daughter of Behn, that is Aphra Behn, who she and Jeslyn Medoff argue was “scandalous, outspoken, sexually explicit” (“Jane Barker and Her Life” 27). In fact, King and Medoff argue that Barker had things in common with both groups of writers. She was political in her writing like Behn and in her later novels the main character presents herself as an inheritor of the tradition of Orinda. King labels Barker a “Janus figure”:

an author who looks back to traditional ways of thinking and feeling as much as she looks forward to the triumph of bourgeois domesticity, a novelist whose fictions distrust the modernity they articulate. That Barker wrote to pious and didactic purposes it would be foolish to deny; but it does not follow that she exemplifies emergent bourgeois femininity either in its manifest constraints or in its supposed “moral authority.” The time has come to put to rest a reputation for ladylike respectability that seriously distorts the meaning of a body of work grounded in political disaffection and to begin to develop a more reliable assessment of a writing life that was not exactly “exemplary.” (*Jane Barker, Exile* 9)

As shown, with *Exilius* she produces a Preface that points to her novel as being moralistic and didactic. This fits her reputation “for ladylike respectability” but behind that frame, the novel has an embedded Jacobite argument and is a “work grounded in political disaffection,” more akin to the works of Behn.

King argues that it is Barker’s Jacobite allegiances that partly lead to the loss of her work. She describes *Exilius* as “an angry work, filled with a Jacobite’s contempt for the credulity of the lower orders, ready to fall for the absurdity of the fiction of the warming-pan birth” (153). It exhibits “fury at the fear-mongering tactics of those with an illegitimate hold on power” (153). However, it is one of Barker’s “most sanguine fictions” (153). Its multiple weddings show the “triumph of ‘unfashionable Constancy’” (153) and proclaim:

faith in the power of loyalty, honour, moral integrity, and steadfast love—sacred ideals in the Jacobite constellation of virtues—to triumph over adverse circumstance. (153)

King suggests such faith fades in Barker’s later novels. In fact, they go as far as rejecting marriage as an option:

If *Exilius* uses romance, exalted love, and a heroic idiom to project Jacobite faith, the more pessimistic patchwork novels for which she is better known turn away from love, marriage, and the heroic possibilities of the past to confront instead the gritty, here-and-now experience of loss, disappointment, loneliness, and compromised loyalty in early Georgian Britain. (153-154)

King also suggests that Barker's work disappeared from view because she had no literary "daughters" (*Jane Barker, Exile* 234), thus her work left little "discernible imprint on her culture" (234). She speculates:

I have come to believe that writers in the generation succeeding Barker paid her little heed for the excellent reason that they would have seen her as one of history's losers many times over: a Jacobite, a Roman Catholic, an unreconstructed spinster, an admirer of Rochester, Cowley and the literary culture of the Restoration, a novelist who announced at the outset of her final—and evidently quickly forgotten—novel that her pen "scrapes an olde Tune, in fashion about three score and six years ago." What could the tart asperities of Jane Barker have to say to women learning to wring out of feminine sensibility an up-to-date "moral authority"? To progressive women like Sarah Scott and Sarah Fielding and the later Eliza Haywood Barker must have looked every bit the anachronism she felt herself to be. No, if we are to appreciate Barker we must seek her significance not in narratives of continuity, lineage, and influence, but rather in the contemplation of the strangeness of her own stranded practices. (234)

The presence of incest in one of her works would only add to this powerful set of marginalising forces.

### *THE CENCI*

Percy Shelley hoped *The Cenci*'s historical origins would give it a position that fiction alone may not afford the subject matter of father-daughter incest. This was not to be. After completing the play, he dispatched it to his friend Thomas Love Peacock asking him to "procure" its "presentation at Covent Garden" (Curran 3). The unidentified manuscript was presented to Thomas Harris, the manager at Covent Garden, who was "morally outraged" (Curran 4) by the play and refused to submit it to actress Eliza O'Neill who Percy Shelley thought would be perfect for the role of Beatrice. "The only consolation he [Harris] could give was to acknowledge the unmistakable talent of the anonymous playwright and

offer to produce another play, if he could write one capable of passing the Examiner of Plays” (Curran 4).

While its stage history stalled, compared to Percy Shelley’s other work *The Cenci* sold well—“though against the measure lately set by Byron the play’s reception was insignificant. However, that the first edition should sell off almost immediately, despite the customarily unfavourable notices, was encouraging” (5). Indeed, the play has been in print since then. From the outset, the reviewers honed in on the objectionable nature of the play’s subject matter. For example, a review in *The Edinburgh Monthly Review* in May 1820 talks about the “perverseness of thought and belief” (Ivy Newman White 186) that allowed Percy Shelley to write such a play. *The New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register* of the same time says even though the narrative is “extant in choice Italian” (Ivy Newman White 181), there was:

no excuse for making its awful circumstances the groundwork of a tragedy. If such things have been, it is the part of a wise moralist decently to cover them. There is nothing in the circumstance of the tale being true which renders it fit for the general ear. (Ivy Newman White 181-182)

And from *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts and Sciences* of April 1820:

Of all the abominations which intellectual perversion, and poetical atheism, have produced in our times, this tragedy appears to us to be the most abominable. We have much doubted whether we ought to notice it; but, as watchmen place a light over the common sewer which has been opened in a way dangerous to passengers, so have we concluded it to be our duty to set up a beacon on this noisome and noxious publication. We have heard of Mr. Shelley’s genius; and were it exercised upon any subject not utterly revolting to human nature, we might acknowledge it. But there are topics so disgusting . . . and this is one of them; there are themes so vile . . . as this is; there are descriptions so abhorrent to mankind and this drama is full of them; there are crimes so beastly and demoniac . . . in which *The Cenci* riots and luxuriates, that no feelings can be excited by their obtrusion but those of detestation at the choice, and

horror at the elaboration. We protest most solemnly, that when we reached the last page of this play, our minds were so impressed with its odious and infernal character, that we could not believe it to be written by a mortal being for the gratification of his fellow-creatures on this earth: it seemed to be the production of a fiend, and calculated for the entertainments of devils in hell. (168)

*The Cenci* was finally staged in 1886 by the Shelley Society at the Grand Theatre in Islington for between 2300 and 3000 invited guests. Hicks and Clarke point out that:

Victorian inhibitions were so strong that *The Cenci* never reached public production during the nineteenth century. The censorship of the Lord Chancellor held so firm that “private” performance alone was possible. (16)

The curtain rose for the 1886 production on a prologue penned by John Todhunter (**Appendix 1**). From Orsino’s mouth the audience is warned of the choices they will have to make when judging Beatrice. Orsino is a strange choice to deliver this prologue given his role, as shown in the chapter on the Suitor(s) and the Father, in Beatrice’s downfall. As Curran shows there was much debate about this prologue with many concluding it was in “poor taste” (188).

In a meeting of the Shelley Society in which the members reminisced a year after the 1886 production George Bernard Shaw claimed:

*The Cenci* was a play unworthy of the genius of Shelley. It was simply an abomination, an accumulation of horrors partaking of a nature of the *tour de force*, and probably written by Shelley merely to satisfy his ambition of producing something for the stage. (188)

Later, however he writes that staging the play was an “impressive experiment” (192):

. . . the powers called forth by it were so extraordinary that . . . if the play be ever adequately acted, the experiment will not be even temporarily fatiguing to witness though it perhaps may prove at one or two points enduringly horrible. (192)

The 1886 production took four hours and Shaw said: “Alma Murray grew visibly tired attempting to sustain the almost super-human energy required for Beatrice” (Curran 192). Oscar Wilde, on the other hand, wrote that the tragedy is “as we read it, a complete work of art—capable indeed, of being acted, but not dependent on theatre presentation” (Curran 191). Hicks and Clarke argue the success of the 1886 staging is often disregarded because the audience was full of Shelleyans and therefore biased.

There has been much debate about *The Cenci*'s suitability for the stage, particularly because of its incest theme. Hicks and Clarke acknowledged that:

Editors as well as critics of Shelley have generally acquiesced in the judgment passed upon the play by his contemporaries that it was unfit for the stage, although there is general agreement that *The Cenci* has few if any rivals among the other poetic dramas written in English since Shakespeare. This view of the tragedy as closet drama is to be found even in critics writing after 1886, when the first performance occurred under the auspices of the Shelley Society. In fact, there is little alteration in the judgment of contemporary Shelley scholars, who should know something about Sybil Thorndike's two productions of *The Cenci* during the 1920s. (11)

They argue that there are two reasons that the play is condemned; Percy Shelley was a theatre outsider and the incest theme was too daring:

Shelley approached the theater as an outsider with little knowledge of the mechanics and techniques of popular art. Furthermore, Shelley aimed higher than the turgid romanticism or briny sentimentalism which characterized the serious drama of his own time, while a later generation that applauded the prosaic, tough-minded realism of Ibsen and Shaw would follow few but Shakespeare into the realm of high tragedy. The theme of incest in *The Cenci* was in itself much too daring for the playgoers of Shelley's generation, while the elevation and intensity with which the poet develops it have seemed beyond the reach or appreciation of more recent audiences. (12).

The coupling of these two facts is what has kept it from the stage, not the litany of other criticisms including “long speeches, the emphasis on emotions rather than

action, illogical plot construction, plagiarism, lacking interest in the subordinate characters” (28). Hicks and Clarke refute all these claims comparing *The Cenci* with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* strengthening their argument with their own experience of the 1940 Bellingham Theatre Guild Production in Washington:

It is difficult to imagine a more severe test of *The Cenci* as a stage play than that afforded by the conditions of the Guild production. With a group of amateurs, on a small stage, with limited technical and financial resources, before average American audiences unaccustomed to poetic drama, the Guild presented *The Cenci* with a success that few if any other Guild productions have attained. The editors can find only one explanation for this success, namely, that *The Cenci* is a great acting drama, one of the very best of its kind. Far from being suited only to reading, it demands performance for full appreciation and understanding. (28-29)

The play was a box office success for the Guild far exceeding their expectations in terms of attendance and cash revenue.

Curran agrees with Hicks’s and Clarke’s suggestion that *The Cenci* “demands performance for full appreciation and understanding” (29):

. . . surely, *The Cenci* belongs on this stage, which has at last developed techniques Shelley attempted to realize for himself, as a reminder of its ties with the past. It belongs there too as a reminder that out of a modern vision of blackest despair a great poet can create the stuff of tragedy, the redemption, the exaltation, the transcendent grace in which the human spirit triumphs. (282)

Curran argues that early nineteenth-century audiences were not ready for the play, which he labels:

Janus-faced, looking backward for its structural means and forward to a time when the theater could treat such themes as Shelley broached with a candor his age lacked. (257)

He argues that the play combines “stage conventions of his own day, which are themselves heavily dependent on Elizabethan models, with a classical austerity reminiscent of the Greeks” (261). The language “seems imitative of Jacobean drama, but its general clarity and its often declamatory nature are again more in

the tradition of classical theater” (261) while the plot’s development is in the classical drama tradition. Thus, Percy Shelley looks back drawing on stage traditions from earlier times but in presenting “an indictment of capitalism that could not be contained within these conventions” (257), he looks forward:

The play is not only an indictment of a social system; it is an exploration of psychology and a study of the nature of good and evil and of the moral codes by which man attempts to distinguish them: “teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself”. In all of these respects it is an individual and modern work, far removed from the customary mode of Elizabethan tragedy. (257)

For these reasons, Curran argues it has been misunderstood (for more on the stage history of *The Cenci* and the notions of Romantic Theatre see Margot Harrison and Jane Moody). Curran’s study is one of only two book-length studies on the play. Ernest Bates’s *A Study of Shelley’s drama The Cenci* (1908) is the other. Both examine the composition and publication, the literary criticism, the 1886 production, the structure, characters, style and meaning of *The Cenci*. The remaining analysis is in articles and book chapters dealing with a variety of issues. These include the play’s relation to its historical story (see Barbara Groseclose, Charles Nicholl, Corrado Ricci, Guy Truman Steffan, Ivy Newman White and George Yost), the ethics of the play (see Mary E. Finn and Stuart R. Sperry), the language and failure of language (see Stephen Cheeke, Anne McWhir, and Michael Worton); themes and structures (see Roger Blood, Robert Brophy, Paul Endo, Mark J. Bruhn, Young-Ok An, Stephen C. Behrendt, Linda C. Brigam, Donna Richardson, Laura L. Runge and Harry White), notions of tyranny, violence, the play as a reaction to the French Revolution (see Robert M. Corbett, Suzanne Ferriss, and Renata L. Kobetts) and the relationship of *The Cenci* to later



work by American writers (see Louise K. Barnett, Spencer Hall, Diane Long Hoeveler, Maria La Monaca, James W. Mathews, and Christina M. Pages).

Barbara Groseclose argues that *The Cenci* “is among the poet’s densest, richest, and most ambiguous creations” (222). The most notable ambiguity is Beatrice’s decision to murder her father. Although Groseclose sees the incest as the “controlling symbol of the play” (222), the inclusion of the incest is often taken for granted with the focus squarely on the parricide. It is not surprising that the incest may have driven this play from the stage nor that it may have caused so many difficulties in interpreting the play. Presented as it is by Percy Shelley, *The Cenci* is challenging and even though Beatrice is at peace by the end, black despair pervades the work, which represents deeds flowing from an excess of hate.

### *MATHILDA*

*Mathilda* was not published in Mary Shelley’s lifetime. It was first published in 1959, but was not readily available until the early 1990s. Since then, it has become available in complete sets of Mary Shelley’s works as well as in smaller readers. *Mathilda* is generally interpreted by literary critics within an autobiographical framework that sees the incest as representing the alienation in the relationship of Mary Shelley and her father William Godwin, Mary Shelley and her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley, and/or as an expression of the excessive grief she felt over the death of her children William and Clara. Much attention is also paid to the relationship between *Mathilda* and works by Shelley’s mother Mary Wollstonecraft and her father Godwin (see Frederick Burwick, Ranita Chatterjee, William D. Brewer, Rosaria Champagne, Pamela Clemit, Terence Harpold, Lauren Gillingham, Katherine C. Hill-Miller, Yasuko Koyanagi, Anne

Mellor, Elizabeth Nitchie, Mary Poovey). The novel's publication history is one of the reasons that *Mathilda* is read as a biographical novel. Godwin suppressed the novel. Mary Shelley sent the manuscript to her father for publishing in 1820 and, although he needed the money, he made no effort to have it published. And then he refused to return the manuscript to her so she could seek publication elsewhere. Mary Shelley asked her friend Maria Gisborne to retrieve the novel from her father but she never managed it. In a letter dated April 28, 1822, Gisborne tells Mary Shelley that: "The learned are of opinion that I shall never obtain possession of 'Mathilda'" (Frederick L. Jones, *Maria Gisborne & Edward E. Williams* 82). Gisborne wrote in her journal that although Godwin:

thinks very highly of some of the parts; he does not approve of the father's letter, because the daughter would not be authorized by it to order the carriage (a strange reason) as she does; the deception on the part of the father with regard to his real design is too complete; for himself he says he should most certainly not have ordered a carriage to be prepared for the pursuit, after receiving such a letter. The pursuit however (and I *add* the catastrophe which closes it) he thinks the finest part of the whole novel. The subject he says is disgusting and detestable; and there ought to be, at least if [it] is ever published, a preface to prepare the minds of the readers, and to prevent them from being tormented by the apprehension from moment to moment of the fall of the heroine; it is true (he says) that this difficulty is in some measure obviated, by Mathildas protestation at the beginning of the book, that she has not to reproach herself with any guilt; but, yet, in proceeding one is apt to lose sight of that protestation; besides (he added with animation) one cannot exactly trust to what an author of the modern school may deem guilt. (Frederick L. Jones, *Maria Gisborne & Edward E. Williams* 44)

Godwin's suppression of the text is generally interpreted as his own fear that *Mathilda* would be read as autobiography but here Godwin makes it clear that he believes Mathilda's protests from early in the text are forgotten, implying that readers will see that Mathilda loves her father, a transgressive suggestion. Perhaps

this is what he finds most disturbing, the fact that Mary Shelley has written of incest in a different light—as the daughter returning her father’s desire.

Elizabeth Nitchie began the autobiographical readings of *Mathilda* when in her introduction to the first edition she likened Mathilda to Mary, Mathilda’s father to Godwin and Woodville to Percy Shelley. She suggests that although:

the main narrative, that of the father’s incestuous love for his daughter, his suicide, and Mathilda’s consequent withdrawal from society to a lonely heath, is not in any real sense autobiographical, many elements are drawn from reality. (vii)

The most radical autobiographical reading comes from Rosaria Champagne who reads the incest in the novel as “real” (57).

*Mathilda* is an incest narrative, one that relies on both the fact of incest and its aftereffects to make narrative sense of the plot, the characters, and the resolution. I am not just a little intrigued that other scholars—both feminist and politically undeclared ones—who have read *Mathilda* conclude everything except the obvious observation: that in a suicidal summer, Mary Shelley used Mathilda to concretize the aftereffects of incest that she herself experienced. That *no* critic has suggested this is no mere oversight: from a radical psychoanalytic-feminist perspective, the incest taboo has enforced critical interpretations of *Mathilda* that maintain the Father’s Law. Predictably, then, the incest taboo functions to dismiss any reading of this text that accepts sexual violations as experiential “truth” as being hopelessly retrograde or a fantasy projection of the reader’s own pathology. Indeed, by denying even the possibility of incest in the Godwin household, critics have located the sexual abuse anywhere but in Mary Shelley’s body. (56-57)

Champagne speculates that because no correspondence between Godwin and Mary Shelley exists about *Mathilda*—in fact most of Mary Shelley’s letters to Godwin have disappeared—that he probably destroyed them “in order to conceal and deny the father-daughter incest that threatened to occur (or occurred? perhaps Godwin was the one ‘embarrassed by the strength of love’ these letters revealed)” (65). She believes that since Mary Shelley was protective of her manuscripts, it would have been unlikely that she sent her only copy of *Mathilda* to Godwin.

Why then did she choose not to publish her copy? And she asks why, if Godwin saw the text as biographical, did he not address the issue with Maria Gisborne or is it that Gisborne simply does not “record the ‘transparent autobiographical connections’” (67).

Champagne argues that Godwin’s demand of a Preface is “perhaps to deflect the autobiographical readings *Mathilda* was sure to generate” (66-67). She queries why:

Godwin relegates *Mathilda* to a category he does not reserve for other incest tales: certainly, he fails to interpret Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) or Percy Shelley’s *Laon and Cythna* (1817) and *The Cenci* (1819) as “disgusting and detestable” on the grounds that they deal with incest. (67)

Champagne forgets here that *The Cenci* and *The Castle of Otranto* both had prefaces. *The Cenci*’s Preface warns readers of what is to come and explains to them that the story is historical. The first two publications of *The Castle of Otranto* were accompanied by prefaces. The first Preface sets up the novel as a recovered ancient manuscript, hence placing a question mark over whether it is history or literature. It is presented as translated by William Marshall with its author the Italian Onuphrio Muralto and was “given the fictive imprint of ‘Naples, 1529’” (Ruthven 5):

Marketed as “a Gothic story” in its second edition of 1765, it turned out to be the inaugural manifestation of a literary genre characterised by its “ghostings of the already spectral” and “recounterfeiting of the already counterfeit.” (Ruthven 5)

When Walpole acknowledges that he is the writer, he is criticised for his actions. Despite this, *The Castle of Otranto* was one of the most popular novels of the eighteenth century among the general reading public. *The Monk*, which has no preface, caused controversy when it was published because of its coverage of lust,

murder and incest. This soon became more acceptable as the Gothic form grew in popularity. The removal of Gothic narratives from “reality” made incest tales within this form more palatable than the overt and confronting incest of *Mathilda*.

Champagne is prepared to accept that readers will deny her suppositions:

There are many ways to minimize or deny the possibility that Mathilda may function as the site of Mary Shelley’s reconstruction of her “excessive and romantic love” (love to heteropatriarchy; incest to me) for Godwin. One way is to declare that if she were *really* molested by Godwin, she would have “said” it somewhere else, somewhere more legitimate than in her fiction. But even if society believed sexual abuse survivors, obligating Mary Shelley to “confess” would naively imply that traumatic memories reside in accessible psychic places. In truth, unless the subject reveals signs of psychosis, experiences with past trauma are “civilized” into silent aftereffects, so that the body “talks” in disguised ways. This results in behaviors, nightmares, addictions, and a multitude of fears, visions, panic attacks, all of which “serve” the trauma survivor by keeping her secret. These aftereffects are evidenced in the “gaps” of Mary Shelley’s letters and journals.

Mary Shelley manages—and perhaps even conceals—her identification with incest by letting her fiction become the repository for this “excessive and romantic” father-daughter connection. Any reader of Mary Shelley’s life—especially during the writing of *Mathilda*—who minimizes the place of telling truths (making self-disclosures) within the narrative of “lies” (fiction) reveals how the incest taboo is a taboo against writing and reading, not against the act of sexual abuse. (87)

Further reasons for Percy and Mary Shelley’s writing about incest are also offered by Barbara Groseclose in “The Incest Motif in Shelley’s *The Cenci*.”

Groseclose argues that both these writers were influenced by the sexual relationship between Percy Shelley and Claire Claremont, Godwin’s stepdaughter by his second marriage:

When Shelley was writing *The Cenci*, he was amorously involved with Claire Claremont, his wife’s half-sister. How far sexually this attachment progressed we do not know, and Shelley’s (and Claire’s) biographers agree only that in all likelihood their union was physical. *Leviticus* 18.18, in a list of incestuous practices, specifically denounces intercourse between a man and his sister-in-law; the prohibition is yet included in the canon of the Anglican

Church. If he knew it, Shelley would scarcely take such an injunction seriously. He would, in fact, probably welcome the opportunity to reject once again the conventions governing moral conduct—conventions which he felt were paltry. I do not know if Mary Shelley would have concurred. Certainly she tried valiantly to adapt herself to Shelley's rigorous, yet free-wheeling personal code, though in regard to his repeated affairs she never wholly succeeded. References to her coldness (in Shelley's own poetry as well as his contemporaries' assessments), her querulousness, and her bitterness gain in frequency around the times Claire formed their spasmodic *menage a trois*. In light of this, it is interesting that Mary herself wrote about incest soon after *The Cenci* was completed and at a time when Claire was still a member of the household. (227)

Caroline Gonda adds to this debate on Percy's relationship with Claire Claremont:

Rumours about Shelley's "incestuous" relationship with Mary and Claire had been circulating ever since the notorious house-party in Switzerland with Byron in 1816 (Byron alleged that his reason for attacking Southey in the Dedication to *Don Juan* was Southey's story that Byron and Shelley had formed "a league of Incest" with two women: "He lied like a rascal—for they *were not sisters*", Byron trumpeted only then going on to deny any carnal knowledge of Mary). (164)

Another couple of possibilities can be suggested here. There had been whispers that Byron's marriage had failed and he was forced to flee England because of his relationship with his sister and the Shelleys spent time with Byron while they were on the Continent. Also before writing *The Cenci*, Percy Shelley had already explored the topic of incest, this time brother-sister incest, in his 1816 poem *Laon and Cythna*, later renamed *The Revolt of Islam*. Any biographical reasons that brought the Shelleys to the topic of incest are interesting but do not necessarily shed light on what occurs in the texts.

In the past ten to twelve years, the critical focus on *Mathilda* has started to change. The newly mapped terrain includes explorations of the images of monstrosity (Miharu Abe), the wandering subject (Graham Allen), desire (Diana Edelman-Young and Susan Allen Ford), melancholia (Kerry McKeever), and

abjection (Tillotama Rajan). The dramatic qualities of the narrative (Charlene E. Bunnell and Charles E. Robinson), its intertextual links (Judith Barbour and Robert Ready), and structure (Susan Bernardo and Audra Dibert Himes) have also been examined.

*Exilius*, *The Cenci* and *Mathilda* have experienced varying successes. Each is the least studied of all works by its author and all are rich texts that deserve critical attention. The inclusion of father-daughter incest as a subject is one of the reasons for the loss of *Exilius*, the suppression of *Mathilda* and infrequent performance of *The Cenci*. Fortunately, this situation is changing, as is the critical interest in each of the works.

### FROM THE MARRIAGE EXCHANGE GONE WRONG TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The notion of incest as the marriage exchange gone wrong began to fade around the end of the long eighteenth century. New ways of conceptualising childhood and alterations in the laws governing incest contributed to the gradual process of redefining incest as child sexual abuse—a change not fully articulated until the late 1960s and early 1970s. This section will chart those changes through the various representations of Beatrice Cenci in both images and text.

In the special exhibition on Beatrice Cenci, the gallery guide is still paused before the alleged portrait of Beatrice by Guido Reni (**Figure 3**). He



**Figure 3**

tells those gathered that Charles Dickens was haunted by the image. Taking up his book, he quotes the writer:

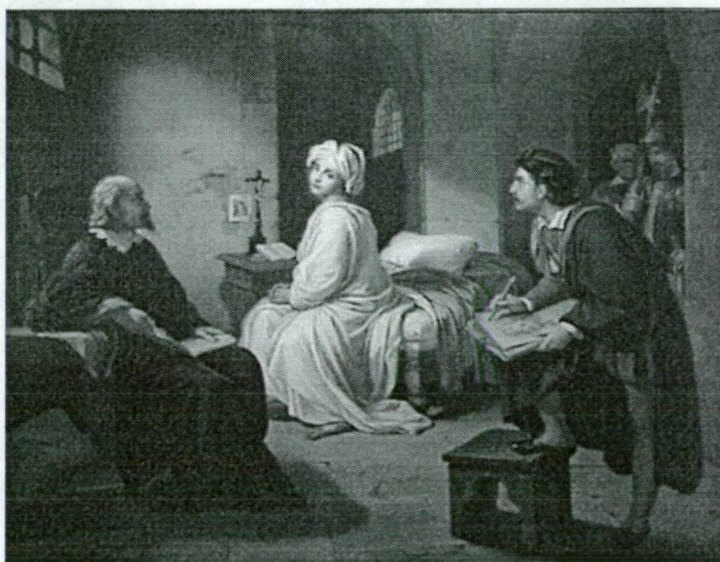


Through the transcendent sweetness and beauty of the face, there is a something shining out, that haunts me. I see it now, as I see this paper, or my pen. The head is loosely draped in white; the light hair falling down below the linen folds. She has turned suddenly towards you; and there is an expression in the eyes—although they are very tender and gentle—as if the wildness of a momentary terror, or distraction, had been struggled with and overcome, that instant; and nothing but a celestial hope, and a beautiful sorrow, and a desolate earthly helplessness remained. (156)

Dickens retells the two main stories surrounding the portrait: first, that Guido painted the portrait before Beatrice's execution and second, that it was from memory after having seen her on the scaffold. The latter, disproved by Ricci, is the story that Dickens believes:

as you see her on his canvas, so she turned towards him, in the crowd, from the first sight of the axe, and stamped upon his mind a look which he has stamped on mine as though I stood beside him in the concourse. (198)

Little known Italian painter Achille Leonardi immortalised the former story in his portrait of Beatrice (**Figure 6**). Like Percy Shelley, Dickens is able to imagine much about the portrait from the stories that surround it.



**Figure 6**

Alongside the portraits in the exhibition are paragraphs from works by famous authors who have written about Beatrice Cenci, many inspired by Percy Shelley's play. The guide says that the American writer Herman Melville offers the following in his novel *Pierre*, written in 1851-1852:



Lucy . . . was standing motionless before a very tolerable copy (the only other good thing in the collection) of that sweetest, most touching but most awful of all feminine heads—The Cenci of Guido. The wonderfulness of which head consists chiefly, perhaps, in a striking, suggested contrast, half-identical with, and half-analogous to, that almost supernatural one—sometimes visible in the maidens of tropical nations—namely, soft and light blue eyes, with an extremely fair complexion, veiled by funereally jetty hair. But with the blue eyes and fair complexion, the Cenci's hair is golden—physically therefore, all is in strict natural keeping; which, nevertheless, still the more intensifies the suggested fanciful anomaly of so sweetly and seraphically *blonde* a being, being double-hooded, as it were, by the black crape of the two most horrible crimes (of one of which she is the object and the other the agent) possible to civilized humanity—incest and parricide. (351)

In this text, Beatrice Cenci's image is at once the "sweetest, most touching" but yet paradoxically the "most awful of all feminine heads." In the text of *Pierre*, the painting offers a warning of the incest in Pierre's life—the woman he loves is his sister. Louise K. Barnett argues that when he wrote this passage Melville had not seen the original portrait. In fact, this is indicated with his words that Lucy is looking at a "very tolerable copy" (*Pierre* 351). It is most likely, she says, that he based his description on an "unreliable copy. Many were inaccurate, not only failing to retain the expression of the original but depicting Beatrice as blatantly sexual. A Beatrice with exposed shoulders and cleavage was not unusual" (176 note 20). James W. Mathews is intrigued by Melville's choice of Beatrice as blonde:

. . . he evidently derived his conception of Beatrice's appearance from Percy Bysshe Shelley, who had depicted Beatrice as a blonde in his drama *The Cenci* (1819) and in statements related to it. Moreover the moral enigma of Shelley's plot and particularly the role of his blonde heroine suggest more than a visual connection between his Beatrice and Melville's characters in *Pierre*. (32)

Mathews believes that Mary Shelley's translation of the early eighteenth-century Italian *Relazione* of the Cenci tragedy is the main source of the "light-

complexioned, blue-eyed Beatrice" (34). "The manuscript story provided Shelley with not only his basic situation but also a description of his main character, which coincided with the Romantic conception of the archetypal heroine" (35).

He argues that both Melville and Percy Shelley were in need of a blonde Beatrice:

For Shelley, Beatrice's bloneness was a fitting emblem of her stringent righteousness and for Melville an ironic expression of the folly of absolutism and uncritical acceptance of appearances.

Shelley's heroine, in keeping with her bloneness, proclaims her translucent goodness amidst the blackness of evil. No matter what she endures or what deeds she has done to assert her and her family's honour and to sustain virtue in her world, she insists on her own purity and innocence. (36)

The blonde Beatrice was therefore a "felicitous literary choice" (39):

Beatrice's coloring became for Shelley an emblem of his heroine's strength as well as her tragic flaw, and Melville chose Shelley's prototype for a climactic image to expose the foolish absolutism of Pierre and the pernicious deception of Lucy's angelic appearance and manner. (39)

Barnett argues that for Melville Beatrice is a "pivotal figure who conjoined the roles of victim and victimizer" (171):

According to the conventional literary dichotomy, the blonde is innocent and virtuous, the brunette sexual and dangerous. Because she is both blonde and sinful, Beatrice violates these stereotypes, and Melville imagines the white turban swathing her head in the portrait replaced with a double hood of black crape symbolizing the two crimes in which she was involved. The contrast between her metaphoric darkness and the fairness of her appearance thus accounts for the "wonderfulness" of the portrait in Melville's eyes, another instance of the treacherous ambiguity of Pierre's world which tragically limits the possibility of true knowledge and right action. (176)

After he finally saw the original painting, Melville made only a short note in his *Journals*. He noted the "Expression of suffering about the mouth—(appealing look of innocence) not caught in any copy or engraving" (*Journals* 108).

Melville's contemporary Nathaniel Hawthorne also writes extensively about the portrait of Beatrice Cenci—in his journal as well as in his novel *The*

*Marble Faun*. It has also been argued that Beatrice in his story “Rappacini’s Daughter” is based on the Cenci tale. Hawthorne writes of the Beatrice in the portrait as casting spells. After saying he could not possibly describe the painting, he does so at length:

It is a very youthful, girlish, perfectly beautiful face, with white drapery all around it, and quite enveloping the form. One or two locks of auburn hair stray out. The eyes are large and brown, and meet those of the spectator; and there is, I think, a little red about the eyelids, but it is very slightly indicated. The whole face is perfectly quiet; no distortion nor disturbance of any single feature; nor can I see why it should not be cheerful, nor why an imperceptible touch of the painter’s brush should not suffice to brighten it into joyousness. Yet it is the very saddest picture that ever was painted, or conceived; there is an unfathomable depth and sorrow in the eyes; the sense of it comes to you by a sort of intuition. It is a sorrow that removes her out of the sphere of humanity; and yet she looks so innocent, that you feel as if it were only this sorrow, with its weight and darkness, that keeps her down upon the earth and brings her within our reach at all. She is like a fallen angel, fallen, without sin. It is infinitely pitiful to meet her eyes, and feel that nothing can be done to help or comfort her; not that she appeals to you for help and comfort, but is more conscious than we can be that there is none in reserve for her. It is the most profoundly wrought picture in the world; no artist did it, or could do it again. Guido may have held the brush, but he painted better than he knew. I wish, however, it were possible for some spectator, of deep sensibility, to see the picture without knowing anything of its subject or history; for no doubt we bring all our knowledge of the Cenci tragedy to the interpretation of the picture. (*French and Italian Notebooks* 92)

Hawthorne begins with a basic description before drawing emotion from the work. He is clear in his belief that Beatrice was an innocent victim and is perturbed that he cannot comfort her. For him it is a profound painting. His final acknowledgement is that he gets all this from the portrait because he knows the story—it is Percy Shelley’s play that he knows—thus he is in agreement with Twain, quoted in the Introduction, that the label brings life to this portrait.

In *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne uses the portrait as a means of defining his female characters Hilda and Miriam who describe the painting in words. Yet Hilda, who has just completed a copy of the painting from memory, says:

... while I was painting her, I felt all the time as if she were trying to escape from my gaze. She knows that her sorrow is so strange, and so immense, that she ought to be solitary forever, both for the world's sake and her own; and this is the reason we feel such a distance between Beatrice and ourselves, even when our eyes meet hers. It is infinitely heart-breaking to meet her glance, and to feel that nothing can be done to help or comfort her; neither does she ask help or comfort, knowing the hopelessness of her case better than we do. She is a fallen angel, fallen, and yet sinless, and it is only this depth of sorrow, with its weight and darkness, that keeps her down upon earth and brings her within our view even while it sets her beyond our reach. (65)

Here there is repetition from Hawthorne's own journal entry. Miriam questions Hilda's description of Beatrice Cenci as sinless:

"That is not so plain to me. If I can pretend to see at all into that dim region, whence she gazes so strangely and sadly at us, Beatrice's own conscience does not acquit her of something evil, and never to be forgiven."

"Sorrow so black as hers oppresses her very nearly as sin would," said Hilda.

"Then," inquired Miriam, "do you think that there was no sin in the deed for which she suffered?"

"Ah," replied Hilda shuddering, "I really had quite forgotten Beatrice's history and was thinking of her only as the picture seems to reveal her character. Yes, yes; it was terrible guilt, an inexpiable crime, and she feels it to be so. Therefore it is that the forlorn creature so longs to elude our eyes, and forever vanish away into nothingness! Her doom is just."

"Oh, Hilda, your innocence is like a sharp steel sword," exclaimed her friend. "Your judgments are often terribly severe, though you seem all made up of gentleness and mercy. Beatrice's sin may not have been so great; perhaps it was no sin at all, but the best virtue possible in the circumstances. If she viewed it as a sin, it may have been because her nature was too feeble for the fate imposed upon her. Ah," continued Miriam passionately, "if I could only get within her consciousness! If I could but clasp Beatrice Cenci's ghost, and draw it into myself! I would give my life to know whether she thought herself innocent, or one great criminal since time began!"

As Miriam gave utterance to these words, Hilda looked

from the picture into her face, and was startled to observe that her friend's expression had become almost exactly that of the portrait; as if her passionate wish and struggle to penetrate poor Beatrice's mystery had been successful. (65-67)

Miriam's central question here is about whether Beatrice saw herself as

"innocent" or "criminal" and in this moment the expression from Beatrice in the portrait is the one on Miriam's face:

It is strange, dear Hilda, how an innocent, delicate, white soul, like yours, has been able to seize the subtle mystery of this portrait; as you surely must, in order to reproduce it so perfectly. (67)

Miriam decides that Beatrice must be as innocent as Hilda for the latter to have been able to copy the portrait so "perfectly".

Later in the novel, Hawthorne builds on the notions of guilt and innocence, already raised in the Hilda and Miriam discussion of the portrait. Innocent Hilda finds herself guilty from having witnessed Miriam's crime of throwing the model into the abyss and now she carries a similar expression to the portrait:

Now, opposite the easel, hung a looking-glass, in which Beatrice's face and Hilda's were both reflected. In one of her weary, nerveless changes of position, Hilda happened to throw her eyes on the glass, and took in both these images at one unpremeditated glance. She fancied—nor was it without horror—that Beatrice's expression, seen aside and vanishing in a moment, had been depicted in her own face, likewise, and flitted from it as timorously.

"Am I, too, stained with guilt?" thought the poor girl, hiding her face in her hands.

Not so, thank Heaven! But, as regards Beatrice's picture, the incident suggests a theory which may account for its unutterable grief and mysterious shadow of guilt, without detracting from the purity which we love to attribute to that ill-fated girl. Who, indeed, can look at that mouth—with its lips half-apart, as innocent as a baby's that has been crying—and not pronounce Beatrice sinless! It was the intimate consciousness of her father's sin that threw its shadow over her, and frightened her into a remote and inaccessible region, where no sympathy could come. It was the knowledge of Miriam's guilt that lent the same expression to Hilda's face. (205)

The narrator assures the reader that she is not stained but seeing Hilda's "shadow of guilt" concludes that Beatrice's face shows the shadow, not of guilt but of knowledge of her father's sin. She herself was therefore not guilty. The question of incest hangs over *The Marble Faun* but is unanswered. The main characters in *Pierre* and *The Marble Faun*—Pierre, Lucy, Isabel, Miriam, Hilda, Donatello and Kenyon—are like Beatrice in that they are all of marriageable age.

The guide says Beatrice Cenci's portrait also appears in two novels by Edith Wharton, *The Mother's Recompense* and *The House of Mirth*. In *The House of Mirth*, the placement of a miniature picture of Beatrice on a pill box in the sitting room throws light on Lily Bart's imprisonment. As Barnett says:

Beatrice Cenci has become a symbol of Lily Bart's imprisonment, not only economically within Mrs. Peniston's household and socially within an inflexible system, but within her own romantic vision of life and self. Wharton's deflation of the portrait serves as a critical commentary on such romanticizing while at the same time a vestige of the romantic sympathy from Beatrice is extended to Lily. (182)

In *The Mother's Recompense* a reference to the portrait "both evokes the customary incest motif and preserves a small piece of social history, one in which Wharton herself has participated" (Barnett 182). The portrait hangs above the double bed in the guest bedroom in the family home presiding over married guests. The next generation keeps the portrait not knowing its history. Barnett explains:

This anomaly works metaphorically to express Kate's peculiar situation. Kate's desire for her daughter's fiancé, her own former lover, is a quasi-incestuous violation of conventional roles. Fleeing her husband and child, Kate abjured the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood; taking a younger man as a lover, she transgressed generational boundaries. Kate smiles patronizingly at John Clephane's ignorance of Beatrice Cenci, but her own lack of self-knowledge has more serious consequences than his lapse of taste. (182)

Hence the incest theme is perpetuated but Wharton also comments on the Romanticisation of the Beatrice Cenci story and perhaps the reproduction and collection of the portrait. Such collection to her represented an American yearning for all things European.

The guide pauses before another painting. He says, for the late twentieth-century author Philip Lindsay who published his novel about the Cenci family, *The Fall of the Axe*, in 1974, the alleged portrait of Beatrice by Guido Reni is not the real Beatrice. Lindsay prefers the painting of Beatrice with her hair flowing and breast bare



**Figure 7**

(**Figure 7**). He says of the

famous portrait, acknowledging Ricci's declaration that this is not Beatrice:

I confess that I surrender the painting without regret. I never could see it with the enraptured eyes of Shelley and other romantics: it always seemed to me but the insipid head of a very ordinary girl. That is not the Beatrice of my imagination, not the strong-willed beautiful creature, passionate in love and hate, that the real Beatrice was when living. No. I see her more clearly in the other alleged portrait by Guido, in the Academy of San Luca in Rome, where she stands fiery in defiance, strong-breasted, big-shouldered, with brave eyes and riotous fair hair bustling from under the turban. But neither, after all, is this painting of Beatrice, for, as Senatore Ricci shows, Guido could never have seen the girl. There are no portraits of her. Old Francesco would never have squandered good scudi on a bit of paint when he had his personal lusts to satisfy. (vi)



Strong-willed and passionate and fiery rather than innocent and shadowed by sorrow and grief is how Lindsay conceives Beatrice. Drawing on the work of Corrado Ricci, he also removes the incest, which was introduced by Percy Shelley, from his version of the story.

Historian Irene Musillo Mitchell agrees with Lindsay but finds that in fact Beatrice is



**Figure 8**

well represented by the many images that try to capture her. She says:

Golden riotous hair, strong-breasted also characterize Beatrice's alleged likeness in Guido's flashing *San Michele*. The dramatic, magnificent archangel powerfully suggests a figure become legendary in history. In her varying moods, Beatrice is all these representations. (19)

The guide tells those gathered that it is legend that Beatrice is the image of the Archangel Gabriel in *San Michele* (**Figure 8**).

The guide says that many more artists have tried their hand at creating their versions of Beatrice. Ricci lists some of these:



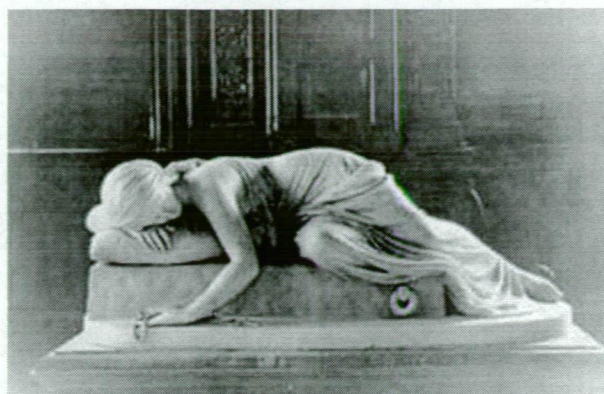
Various canvases have been painted dealing with the theme of Guido's introduction into the prison-cell: one by Achille Guerra ("Interrogation of Beatrice Cenci"); one by Tommaso De Vivo, exhibited in Naples in 1848; one by Giuseppe Sogni, of 1852; one by Rocchetti, exhibited in Milan in the same year, etc. In these paintings Beatrice's figure is always in her Oriental costume; and in this dress she is represented in other pictures such as Guerrino Guardabassi's "Last Meeting of Beatrice Cenci and her Stepmother" and "Last Confession of Beatrice Cenci"; and also in several sculptures, including a bust by Emilio Dies and the statues by Vincenzo Annibale, Vincenzo Lucardi, Antonio Bottinelli, etc. This singular costume was abandoned in Paul Delaroche's painting (1855), representing "Beatrice on her Way to Execution." . . . The costume was likewise abandoned by Bernardo Celentano in his sketch, "Beatrice in prison" . . . ; by Cesar Francassini in the spirited sketch representing "Beatrice on the Scaffold while Bernardo Swoons"; and by Dario Querci in his canvas: "The Mob Thronging to See Beatrice's Body," which he pictures lying on the bier at the entrance of the Ponte Sant' Angelo, etc.

We shall not speak of the illustrations, occasionally adequate, often mediocre, and very often hideous, to novels which have the story of the Cenci as their subject.(2: 283-284)

Two nineteenth-century artists, one English and one American, are both likely to have been influenced by Percy Shelley's *The Cenci* as well as Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*. A sculpture of Beatrice Cenci was one of Harriet Hosmer's first commissions. The American sculptor made the marble work in 1857 for the Mercantile Library of St. Louis, Missouri. Hosmer, who grew up in Massachusetts, moved to Rome in 1852 joining a large international circle of artists and writers that included poets Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning and writers Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James. She went on to become one of the most successful sculptors of her day with her humorous figure of Puck, which eventually sold fifty replicas including one to the Prince of Wales, her first success. Perhaps her best-known work is Zenobia, now housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Hosmer remains important today, not

just for her sculpture of Beatrice,  
but as the model for Hilda in *The  
Marble Faun*.

Guido Reni's portrait is  
the only source of inspiration  
Hosmer credited for her sculpture  
of Beatrice Cenci (**Figures 9 and  
10**).



**Figure 9**

In the anonymous biographical sketch written during her lifetime and endorsed by the artist herself, the writer reported that Hosmer reproduced the headdress as it appears in the Reni portrait, rendering it as accurately in marble “as the difference of material will permit.” Years later, in an interview given in St. Louis, she attributed the sculpture to “a picture by Guido [Reni], now in the Barberini Palace in Rome.” (Sherwood 133)

Hosmer's representation of Beatrice is somewhere between that of childhood and that of daughter of marriageable age:

The extended figure of Beatrice Cenci lies on a raised block that serves as couch in her prison cell. Although she will die on the following morning, her deep sleep is a natural one, her position



**Figure 10**

relaxed but graceful. The head, supported by the cushion . . . rests on the right arm, the left falling lightly over the side, one hand fingering a rosary, symbol of the girl's prayers for divine mercy. The left leg is drawn up under the extended right, a pose that suggests the attitude of a child in sleep. (Sherwood 134)

A change in the perception of Beatrice is taking place in this sculpture, the guide says. Biographer Dolly Sherwood speculates that Percy Shelley's *The Cenci* and Walter Savage Landor's *Five Scenes*, written in 1851 and a work that ignores both the incest and murder of the Cenci story, may have influenced Hosmer. Although Hosmer makes no mention of Percy Shelley, she knew Landor. Sherwood's feeling that Hosmer knew *The Cenci* comes because it strikes her that:

Her image of Beatrice Cenci reflects the final stage of development of the character that Mary Shelley described after Shelley's death—"from vehement struggle, to horror, to deadly resolution, and lastly to the elevated dignity of calm suffering, joined to passionate tenderness and pathos." (131)

She acknowledges that as much as it is possible that Hosmer knew *The Cenci*, Percy Shelley was out of fashion in Rome at the time. However, Hosmer's image of the sleeping Beatrice in the prison cell is very like that described in the final scenes of *The Cenci*.

While Hosmer's work hovers between that of a child and that of a daughter of marriageable age, the photographs of Julia Margaret Cameron depicting Beatrice are those of a child, the guide says, coming to pause before five photographs. The Indian/English photographer, who began her career at 48, "has become recognized as a great portraitist and one of photography's pioneers" (Wood 7). Although her work includes many portraits of great Victorian men—social critic Thomas Carlyle, astronomer Sir John Herschel, theorist of evolution Charles Darwin, painter George Frederic Watts, poets Robert Browning, Henry



Wadsworth Longfellow and Alfred Lord Tennyson—it is for her portraits of women that she is best known. As Sylvia Wolf says:

On the faces of Cameron's female subjects, we read langour, melancholy, defiance and desire. Love is there too, but only as one of the many complex emotions Cameron attributed to women. While much of the energy in Cameron's portraits of famous men derives from her appreciation of the mind and spirit of her subjects, her portraits of women reflect a broader inquiry into human nature and into the expressive possibilities of photography. On the one hand, they offer Victorian viewers many possible models of feminine behaviour and they reveal the ideals against which women of her day were measured. On the other they display Cameron's unbridled love of photography. It is in her portraits of women that she gave herself the most room for artistic experimentation and that she displays the greatest range. (24)

Cameron created five interpretations of Beatrice Cenci in a five-year period using two models—May Prinsep and

Kate Keown. There are three pictures of Prinsep, two taken when she was thirteen, the other at seventeen (**Figures 11, 12 and 13**) and two of Keown (**Figures 14, and 15**). In these images Keown is just ten, "her face exhibiting the soft contours of youth and eyes as velvety as the centers of black-eyed Susans"



**Figure 11**

(Wolf 60). In all five portraits, says Wolf:

the sitters are draped in a Middle Eastern style shawl reminiscent of the one in the Barberini painting. By the somber looks on her models' faces, it appears that Cameron depicted the period after Cenci's sentence and before her death. (60)



They are clearly based upon the Reni portrait and try to depict the mixture of anguish, distress and sorrow Beatrice may have felt. Wolf sums up:

While Beatrice Cenci's tale is a violent one, she is depicted in both the Barbarini painting and in Cameron's photographs as a gentle sympathetic character. Neither demure nor showing sympathetic anguish, she appears sad but clear-eyed, self-possessed and accepting of her fate. To the Victorians a story like Cenci provided an outlet for the emotional drama that in real life was so stringently restrained. It also allowed viewers to consider moral questions through art rather than religion. For the most part, religious images did not figure prominently in British art of the 1860s and 1870s. Instead moral messages were conveyed through myth, literary allusion, or domestic narratives. That Cenci took action against abuse, and took responsibility for those actions, made her both dangerous and noble, an alluring combination of traits with which to tell a moral tale. (60)

The only one of Cameron's photographs to feature a daughter of marriageable age is **Figure 11**. In this photograph, the model Prinsep is seventeen whereas in the others she is just thirteen and a girl child as are those of Keown. A change has clearly taken place from the original image of Beatrice as a daughter of marriageable age in the alleged portrait by Guido Reni to that of a child. Through the passage of time, notions of incest as child sexual abuse replace the concept of incest as the marriage exchange gone wrong.



**Figure 12**



**Figure 13  
(right)**



**Figure 14  
(below left)  
and Figure  
15 (below  
right)**



The change in the conception was gradual. It was beginning by the time that Percy and Mary Shelley were writing. By the end of the nineteenth century, childhood would be a category that included some of the daughters previously thought to be of marriageable age. Once the notions of childhood changed, the conception of incest as child sexual abuse would begin to have currency.

Childhood as well as being about age would become known, as Carolyn Steedman argues, a “category of dependence, a term that defined certain relationships of powerlessness, submission and bodily inferiority or weakness” (Austin 77).

Childhood was being redefined at this time in the discussion of the poor law, child labour and education as well as in the works of Romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth. Although institutional and societal changes were yet to come, the rhetoric had started. Louise A. Jackson points out that:

A growing body of interdisciplinary studies has drawn attention to the emergence of the romantic conception of childhood and its increasing hold on nineteenth century minds. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Calvinist notion of original sin had stressed that children were evil by nature, requiring rigorous discipline to resist temptation. From the end of the eighteenth century, however, this was replaced with the idea, promoted by Wordsworth and the romantic poets, that children, born as innocents were innately virtuous. (5)

Jackson argues that following the change of attitudes to childhood, moves towards modern laws on incest began as attitudes to incest changed in Victorian England. While child sexual abuse is considered a “late twentieth century phenomenon” (2), she argues that the late nineteenth century saw “mass campaigning and parliamentary legislation” over “emotive” topics such as “child prostitution, incest and the age of consent” (2):

Victorians used a wide collection of euphemisms—“moral corruption”, “immorality”, “molestation”, “tampering”, “ruining”, “outrage”—to refer to sexual abuse, which was prosecuted in the courts as indecent assault, rape, unlawful carnal knowledge or its

attempt. Although not widespread the term “sexually abused” was indeed used by Scottish surgeon George William Balfour in his 1864 translation of a work on forensic medicine by Johann Ludwig Casper. Although Victorians had no umbrella term that was uniformly applied, they would certainly have recognised the term “child sexual abuse” . . . Victorians had a clear concept of inappropriate sexual attention that constituted abuse of power and which, on various occasions, was brought to public attention as an issue. (2-3)

Nancy Anderson also argues that the Victorians confronted the issue of incest during the debates over the possibility of marrying one’s deceased wife’s sister, which continued from the long eighteenth century into the nineteenth century. Anderson argues that the Deceased Wife’s Sister Bill became “a hardy annual” (68). The Lord Chancellor Lyndhurst “introduced into the House of Lords a bill to correct an ambiguity in the law concerning marriages within prohibited degrees” in 1835 (67). His motive was “to guarantee the legitimacy and inheritance of the son of the seventh Duke of Beaufort, who had married his deceased wife’s half-sister” (67). Until Lyndhurst’s amendment was passed in 1835, “marriages within the prohibited degrees could be annulled at any time within the lifetime of both spouses by the Ecclesiastical Court” (67). But while parliament declared “all marriages within the prohibited degrees of affinity contracted before August 31, 1835 . . . immediately and absolutely valid” (67), they “tightened the law for the future by adding a clause which made marriages of both affinity and consanguinity contracted after that date absolutely void” (67). This did not quell the debate with aims to have marriage to one’s deceased wife’s sister removed from the prohibited degrees, a fact “not realized until 1907” (68). Anderson suggests that:

In arguing whether a man should be allowed to marry his deceased wife’s sister, Victorians had to discuss incest. They had to decide if incest involved relations of consanguinity only, or also affinity. They had to judge whether there was a natural instinct against



incest which would lessen the importance of legal prohibitions, or if the incest taboo was merely created artificially by social need, requiring therefore rigorous external enforcement. Was incest a private individual matter, which the community should not try to control, or did it so threaten the social order that it must be of public concern? (69)

The control of incest laws also changed in the nineteenth century. Incest was punishable by the church courts in England until 1857 but it was not until 1908 that it became a crime in England and Wales and by then was being redefined and its connection was with child abuse not marriage. The “removal of power from the Church left incest neither an ecclesiastical nor a criminal offence” (Bell 126). This contrasts with Scotland where incest had been criminal since 1567. Until it was updated in 1986, the act concerning incest was in “old Scots and criminalised the ‘abominabill, vile and fylthie lust of incest’ with reference to the relevant chapter of Leviticus” (Bell 127). There are still differences between the English and Scots criminal law, namely that the latter is more comprehensive including more relationships as well as including a clause covering step-children. “In both, consent is no defence” (Bell 127).

The nineteenth century also saw the development of disciplines such as psychology, sociology and anthropology that all sought ways to define incest—most of which have since come under fire from the feminist movement. Perhaps the most central contribution of feminism—I realise I am generalising about a movement with many facets—is the transformation of incest and child sexual abuse from a social rule that is rarely broken (anthropology and sociology) and a fantasy of the unconscious in connection to various passages in childhood (psychology) to a recognised regularly occurring but largely hidden event in society. In the course of feminist writings, incest came to be redefined under the

umbrella of child sexual abuse, as a symbol of the patriarchy with the rape of girl children often described as the ultimate tyranny faced by women.

By the time Cameron was taking her photographs, attitudes towards incest had changed and that was reflected in her work. But that is not the end of the story of the influence of the portrait of Beatrice Cenci. In 2001 the amateur theatre group People's Theatre in Newcastle, England produced *The Cenci*. In the publicity shots on their website, a photograph of Felicity Clausen-Stemwald



**Figure 16**

(**Figure 16**) as Beatrice is taken in a similar pose to that of Guido Reni's alleged portrait, except she is looking over her right shoulder instead of her left. However, another interesting turn has taken place. This young woman looks more like a daughter of marriageable age depicted by Percy Shelley in his play than the child featured in Cameron's photographs does. Although she does not wear the headdress of the original portrait, there is an attempt to capture the sombre look that featured in the original portrait.

It is important for us to visualise daughters in works such as *Exilius*, *The Cenci* and *Mathilda*, to imagine them in their place and in the confrontations with their fathers. The visual impact of the girl-child is so strong in contemporary

incest writing that it is hard for us to imagine that the daughters of the incest stories of the long eighteenth century are like Susanna Hyde Gale and Susanna Highmore (**Figure 2**). The historical change in the conception of daughterhood and its confusion with childhood is visible through the history of the portrait of Beatrice Cenci. When we think about incest texts of the long eighteenth century we need to think about the Susannas, not about Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs. This thesis began with John Berger's thought that words change images; in the case of reading incest stories within their historical context, images illuminate words.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Wilson argues that Barker's work has come into focus since Jane Spencer's 1983 article on the author. Margaret Doody and Paula R. Backscheider contributed biographical work and Eleanor Winkborg wrote her first article in the years following Spencer's article. However, most of the critical interpretations have been made post 1994—including works by Toni Bowers, James Fitzmaurice, Misty Anderson, Leigh A. Eike and Carol Shiner Wilson—when Kathryn King began to publish heavily on the author bringing her works back into focus and reassessing her importance as a writer, work that culminated with King's biography of Barker in 2000.

<sup>2</sup> King argues that when Barker "enters the market-place as a novelist, writing as a woman for woman readers" she emphasizes "her place in a female line of poetic descent epitomized by Orinda" (137). Carol Barash in *English Women's Poetry 1649-1714* argues that Barker's poetry "repeatedly draws on patterns" from the works of Philips and Aphra Behn but that she "begins to shift these patterns in ways that will be important for later and better poets, male and female alike" (176). She suggests that both Anne Finch and Alexander Pope read Barker's poetry and "developed poetic possibilities suggested by her rough and often intentionally fragmented works" (176). As well Barker's poetry "draws liberally on the works of Milton, Dryden and Marvell, providing a crucial link between Philips and Behn, their male contemporaries, and the first generation of eighteenth-century English poets" (176). Carol Shiner Wilson argues that Barker also draws on the works of Sir Philip Sidney, Sir John Denham, John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, and after *Exilius* when she was writing novels, she "increasingly incorporated a wide range of authors and genres popular in her time" (xxxii). She drew from Restoration comedies by Shadwell, Etherege and Wycherley, "popular compilations of ancient and modern proverbs and fables" (xxxiii) and the work of Daniel Defoe.

## APPENDIX ONE – THE PROLOGUE TO THE 1886 STAGING OF *THE CENCI*

This prologue by John Todhunter was included in the edition prepared by Formans for the 1886 Shelley Society performance of *The Cenci*. This reprinting is taken from Arthur C. Hicks and R. Milton Clarke, *A Stage Version of Shelley's Cenci*. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers Ltd, 1945.

The prologue is spoken by Orsino who was played by Leonard S. Outram in the 1886 version.

Wherefore in earnest concourse are ye come  
With hearts that chide the moments till this dumb  
And shrouded stage grow eloquent? Can your eyes  
Delight their sense with tawdry properties  
The pomp of theatres, the glittering shows  
Of the mummer's art; with tinsel joys and owes  
Posturing before a painted scene – today,  
O'er budded woodlands when the eyes of May  
Gaze blue from the deeps of heaven when her sweet breath  
To the young leaves and blossoms uttereth  
Summer's delicious name?

Nay, who sit there

Quicken to rarer influence, from that sphere  
Supernal, of the pure unbodied mind,  
Whence, feel ye now what breaths? Spirit or wind  
Instinct with Shelley! What if we be pent  
Form the rejoicing fields, we are content  
With the poor circuit of these walls; for lo!  
That wind has breathed upon them and they grow  
A Temple of the Spirit: this curtain green  
Of common baize, the stage's homely screen,  
Turns to the pall that hides the inmost cell  
Of Tragedy.

“The Cenci!” With what spell

Thrills in your ears that name? “The Cenci!” Falls  
On your hushed hearts a silence that appals  
Like the dumb pause of nature, ere the storm  
Wake in stern music? Here in breathing form  
Shall pass before you now, as though for you  
His spirit in its travail groaned anew,  
Shelley's tremendous vision. Ye shall behold  
That monstrous Father in strange hate grown old,  
That wrinkled vice, that rank malignity  
Spawned from the opulent slime of Italy.  
Ye shall see Beatrice, that sweet and strong  
Nature, disnatured by unnatural wrong

Avenging crime with crime –

O who durst weigh  
Her guilt, her innocence? Who shall assay  
Gold of such dreadful mint?

Hold thou the scale,  
Manage the crucible, who hast told the tale  
Of Guido and Pompilia, weighing well,  
With beam that mounts to heaven or sinks to hell,  
Like the archangel, souls in thy balance true;  
For thou, we know, art with us now, to do  
Honour to Shelley, and we keep today,  
Browning, thy Birthday on this Seventh of May  
Which brings a Titan to belated birth.  
But lo! the hour comes flying o'er the earth  
Even to these gates – its advent peal is rung,  
Hushed be the babble of this faltering tongue,  
As rills at thunderous rising of the sea.  
“The Cenci!”

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